Butterfly Heart

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Butterfly Heart

by The_Fictionist

Summary

AU - Silence of the Lambs/Hannibal inspired. After recent events in his life, Hermione refers Harry to the renowned psychiatrist, Doctor. T. Riddle. He is unlike anything Harry ever expected or imagined, and soon proves to be a great help against the very shadows and name that haunts his waking hours. If only it remained that simple.

- Translation into Polski available: Motyle serce by Panna_Mi
- Translation into Español available: Butterfly Heart (Traducción) by Sthefy

Part One: 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The waiting room was expensive and elegant. He was sitting on a dark leather sofa, trying not to fidget, his hands clenching and unfurling in his lap.

Harry couldn't believe Hermione had talked him into this.

It took everything he had, every scrap of effort and will, not to simply bolt out of the quiet room, and from the door – most particularly from the man behind the door, and all the implications therein.

The Wizarding World didn't normally have psychiatrists, and if they did, they tended to be called 'Mind Healers', working at St Mungo's.

Tom Riddle was an unprecedented case.

He was famous throughout the country for his knowledge of the human mind and all fields of psychiatry, including criminology, which allowed the Aurors to consult with him in an almost muggle fashion on cases.

Maybe that was why he was here too. He didn't know.

All he knew was that he was crumbling along the edges like burnt paper, his health slowly shriveling up to a charred crisp of ruin.

He wetted his lips, glanced at the ticking clock, then down at his knees.

He'd never liked the thought of psychiatric care of any kind, muggle or magical – but Hermione had assured him that Riddle wasn't the type to shove pills at him across a table. She said he was just someone to talk to. Someone who would help sort out his thoughts, an unjudging ear.

He thought it was a load of crap, like he was some sort of broken toy that needed to be wound up and fixed.

But it had become mandatory, in the light of recent events, that he attend and at least try.

The waiting room was empty outside of him, meticulously tidy and clean. It was too sterile for his personal enjoyment, though he was sure some would find the white space soothing and calm.

His nails dug into his palms, drawing thin scarlet crescents of blood. His throat bobbed.

The clock ticked on.

An unjudging ear aside, he still didn't like this. But he had to sit through six months of these sessions if he wanted to maintain his position as an Auror, and he certainly wanted to catch Voldemort. The man had gone quiet since his last murder and attack, but Harry just knew he was still out there. Somewhere.

Six months was more than enough – hell, as far as he was concerned, one session was enough. Riddle charged fucking exorbitant prices anyway.

He was pretty sure he could ramble at a drunk on the street and it would have the same bloody effect, and the indifference of an unjudging ear.

His insides twisted.

He was on his feet the second the door opened, mouth a little dry.

Tom Riddle was everything he'd expected from the photos and things he'd heard about the man. He came highly recommended of course, and he had an excellent track record – but that did absolutely nothing to ease Harry's qualms and doubts. Maybe it only strengthened them.

He didn't like the thought of people psychoanalysing him, of trying to get into his head. Hell, he wasn't really one for introspection at all nowadays. He was pretty sure that there were a few things not right up there, and maybe that was just another reason he didn't want to touch it. He didn't know what he would find, what he might rouse from the darkness lurking at the back of his mind.

But he was Harry Potter; he wasn't allowed to quietly crack and splinter around the edges.

Riddle was infuriatingly well dressed and polished, just like his waiting room. It all seemed like a trap to him, this conscious effort to give a certain image. The waiting room was designed to put people at ease, and Riddle … he didn't know what Riddle was aiming for, but he didn't like the thought that the man was probably aiming for something.

He was, however, younger than expected.

Harry stared uncomfortably at the floor as the man's last patient left after many a "thank you" and fervent wringing of Riddle's hand.

"Mr Potter, if you could come in and take a seat."

Riddle's voice was like liquid velvet; he didn't trust it.

This was it. If he was going to bolt, he should definitely do so now.

Hermione would be so disappointed; Ron too. Maybe it was with that bad taste in his mouth that he stiffly entered the other room, much like a man walking into battle, or perhaps even to his execution. He shook Riddle's hand, jaw tight, and looked for a –

A sofa. This had to be some kind of joke.

He immediately moved to take the only chair – which was obviously Riddle's – only for the man to calmly but firmly grab his arm and steer him into sitting on the sofa.

His eyes flashed.

Yeah, no way was he putting up with this; the man was like a bad cliché.

He definitely wasn't doing the whole lying down thing, that was just ridiculous, and he didn't see how it would help with anything.

He shifted to be poised on the very edge of the seat instead, ready to spring. Riddle calmly pulled his chair around and sat in front of him, his hands folded in his lap. He didn't have a notebook, at least that was something.

There was a long, uncomfortable silence, wherein Riddle just stared at him – and he was pretty damn sure that was not the way these things were supposed to go! Staring was rude, besides.

He glared back flatly, refusing to be the first to yield, to break eye contact or flinch.

Finally, Riddle spoke, after five minutes must have gone past where they just eyed each other up.

“Why are you here, Harry?”

“Oh, so we’re on a first-name basis already? That’s not very professional,” Harry returned. To his surprise, a small smile crossed Riddle’s lips.

“On the contrary, considering the nature of my line of work I see no reason for such stifling formalities whilst within this room.”

“You think calling me Harry is going to make me open up to you? You have my file, why don’t you just read the answer to your question? You – you know perfectly well why I’m here.”

Voldemort. The murders. The attack. *Everything*.

“I don’t look at files.” Riddle waved an almost dismissive hand. “I prefer to come to my own conclusions and observations, and – as shocking as it might be – to talk to my clients, rather than relying on the judgements made by other people.”

Despite himself, Harry snorted at the dry tone of voice. He was suspicious that Riddle should make him want to crack a smile so quickly. It wasn’t the at-ease-with-this-situation type of smile, but it was one nonetheless.

“Clients? Not patients?”

“Yes, clients,” Riddle said calmly. “‘Patient’ would indicate that I am going to treat you.”

Harry’s brow raised, and he studied the other with a sceptical curiosity. This … wasn’t what he expected. Hermione had said the man was different from others in his field, but he hadn’t quite believed it. He thought she was just trying to make sure he went to the appointment.

“You’re not?” he questioned.

“No. I’m going to inspire you to treat yourself. It is more than clear that your concerns are within your mind, or you would not have been referred to me, but your concerns are not clinical in the sense of a psychological disorder, which would be treated differently – such as schizophrenia or bipolar, which are partially caused by chemical imbalances within the brain,” Riddle said. “Hence, you are the primary person able to treat yourself, with assistance. Your concern is not genetic either. Why are you here?” he asked again.

“Must be interesting doing your job,” Harry replied after a moment. “One of the few professions in our world where people spill their secrets out so freely on the first meeting.” As if; did people really spill their guts out to a stranger? Maybe it was therapeutic? It probably was, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it.

“You misunderstand my question, Harry,” Riddle said. “Right now I am not interested in the specific details concerning why you need or want my help, I’m more preoccupied with the fact that you are visiting me when you clearly don’t want to – why you are here. Friend?”

Harry didn't quite gape at the man, though his eyes might have widened briefly.

"Yeah," he said, after a moment. "Friend. I don't like psychiatrists."

"Why not?"

"You tell me, you're the psychiatrist."

"You don't like the feeling of being psychoanalyzed and picked apart, and you don't want to know whatever's in your own head, not in the least because this is going to be a painful process, forcing you to confront issues you'd rather ignore. You also don't like the implication that you are in need of help, and so, in your mind, somehow weak or broken. In need of fixing."

"Good guess," Harry sneered.

"It wasn't a guess. It's quite common a response, actually."

"Aren't you supposed to be telling me I'm a special snowflake?" His tone tightened. "Not trivializing my issues with seeking psychiatric help?"

"Just because something is common, does not mean it's trivial. Death is the most common thing in existence and the only thing every creature in existence shares, yet I would hardly call that trivial when our lives are ruled by it, its impacts, and our fear of it," Riddle returned, not missing a beat. Harry paused at the thought, before finally looking away and around the room.

Much like the waiting room, it was clean and tidy. There was the sofa, the chair, a desk, and a large cabinet. There was also another door.

"Where does that go to?" he asked instead.

"I'm sure you'll find out during the course of our sessions."

"You seem so damn sure I'm going to come back, when I just said that I don't like psychiatrists."

Riddle laughed lightly. "I'm not your average mind healer."

"Clearly," Harry muttered. "Your professionalism leaves much to be desired."

"Where would professionalism get me on such a personal matter? I fully intend to push you out of your comfort zone, Harry. I am going to get inside of your head, and I'm going to drag you there too, however much you would rather run away from your problems."

"Not if I don't come back, you won't."

"Well, you haven't left yet, have you?" Riddle smirked. Harry scowled at that, immediately getting to his feet, and the other held his hands up in a placating gesture. "One session. Isn't that what you promised your friend? Hermione?"

"How –"

"I don't need to read your file to recognise the Ministry's Golden Boy Auror, and to know who he keeps company with. From there it is a matter of logical deduction as to who sent you when you so obviously didn't send yourself. Moreover, I had a feeling someone would refer you to me sooner or later. It was only a matter of time."

Harry's scowl deepened, and he clenched his jaw. Riddle continued to survey him evenly, only making a polite gesture for him to sit down. The look in his eyes was very different however – challenging, daring him to run like a coward. It was that look that stopped him; there was something there, which he couldn't put his finger on. And, of course, the challenge against cowardice.

Sometimes he hated being a Gryffindor.

He sat down.

Many people turned to psychiatry, mind healing, and such professions out of a desire to help people, to make them better.

Tom could safely say he wasn't like that at all, and maybe that was what made him exceed at his job. He didn't follow the conventional norms of his trade, he refused the traditional methods, and his motivations were purely selfish.

Simply put, he liked secrets, and he liked puzzles, and he could quite easily put on a different face tailored for the requirements of his current projects – official or otherwise. He could play the gentle listener, he could give people exactly what they wanted, he knew what they expected.

Harry was no different – his points on the matter remained valid, and he hadn't lied about his methodology.

Most of the people who came to him were dull. Interesting in their own way, in the complexity of their emotions, which he simply couldn't understand but devoured eagerly anyway to feed his own appetites for power and control, for trophies, for the hearts and souls he consumed for his own ends – but he was excited for this one.

It was … perfect. He really had been hoping someone would refer the 'Boy Who Lived' to him.

Harry Potter. Just perfect.

Of course, the boy wouldn't remember him, and didn't know all that he'd done, which just brought a delicious irony to the situation.

Especially because they would inevitably be talking about Voldemort. His eyes gleamed for a split second, as Harry settled on the sofa again.

Although his knowledge could, conveniently, be attributed to Harry's fame, really there was a much more personal history here. This was going to be so much fun. The best in his collection, and he always collected them in the end. They were his, all his pets, and he would claim and treasure them.

He always had been more selective with his clients once he had the acclaim to do so.

He would fix Harry, certainly – never let it be said he wasn't good at his job. The interesting thing would be what he fixed him into, what he uncovered, how he could use the knowledge to keep his own secrets and agendas safer, how he shaped Harry and would, with time, possess him too.

Harry was the one who'd got away from him once before. No longer.

He offered the younger a man a brilliant smile.

Let the games begin.

He’d always had a very good idea of what he wanted.

Chapter End Notes

Starting the slow process of moving some of my fics onto A03, hence the massive surge of 17 chapters all of a sudden. As the summary says, inspired by NBC's Hannibal. I hope you like it and I'd love to hear what you think :)

Beautiful Crime Scene by a wonderful anon :) Praise her!

Also, RustamAndTheWhiteDemon made a fanmix for Butterfly Heart that you should listen to.

Part One: 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scarlet. Ivory. Vacant gaze. Red hair, dark hair. Legs and arms spread and pinned to the wall like a butterfly on a cork board. Mouth open in a silent scream. Blood on his hands, in the corner of his mouth, and in the quiet drip onto the floor.

Harry's eyes snapped open as he stared up into the darkness, chest heaving for air. For a second, the images still swirled through his head, like the after-flash of a camera burnt on his mind. He sat up, shoving his twisted duvet aside. The bed sheets were drenched in a cold sweat.

He rubbed his eyes. Riddle's contact details and office hours were still tacked onto his fridge, and he stared at them now. He had moved to stand in the kitchen, cold seeping into his toes as he clutched a glass of water in his hand.

He wished his hand was shaking. It wasn't. It was perfectly steady.

He knew there was something deeply wrong with him.

In the Auror department they had called it a traumata, a response to all of the things he'd seen. It wasn't that unusual, "the job gets to you after a while."

The job did get to him, but not in the way they thought.

They wanted him on Voldemort's case the most, because apparently he was so good at making links and understanding the man, his motives, his thoughts. If only they knew.

He sipped his water.

He felt it. At those ones. It was like something extra in the copper of the blood, in the emptiness of the victim's eyes – something dark, like a shadow that sunk into his bones and hooked into his guts like chains.

His heart was speared onto the wall like their bodies, in a parody of a museum collection. Always the same. Voldemort did so love to collect things, he knew that. He wished he didn't. He wished he didn't know of Voldemort's tendency towards trophies.

He didn't know why the monster did the things he did – without any seeming purpose or cause. There didn't seem to be any greater plan, and if there was, it was jumbled – blocked off from him, like a frosted window which only allowed him to see a distorted version of the view.

But he could feel it.

With any other crime scene, any other case, he could analyse, he could do his best, he could feel sick at the worst stains of humanity.

At Voldemort's crime scenes, he felt the possessiveness, the monstrous almost-love – so fleeting, when he held their lives in his hands – the rush of power, the beauty the man saw in death, all of it blurring indistinguishably with absolute terror.

He didn't know why he felt it. They said it was because of the first incident, the Avada Kedavra connection. It was muffled, but when he stepped into the man's crime scenes – into his mind and into the blackest aspects of his soul – he could feel it and it claimed him.

The most awful, terrible things coupled with the wildest of joys, and it terrified him because whenever he'd been to one of those scenes he would come home with bloodlust itching beneath his skin and thoughts of murder slipping through his dreams.

He'd see people on the street and wonder, involuntarily.

The man made him feel violated. Voldemort made him feel like he was the killer, that he could be the killer … that maybe lines of red tape should become redder and then broken entirely for the sake of greater justice.

The worst part was that he thought the link went both ways, even if he couldn't pinpoint it, because over the years the crime scenes got more elaborate – like Voldemort was trying to impress him.

To show him what he could do.

And all the time his own reputation grew: the boy, the Auror who could maybe catch Voldemort – who could defeat him; the victim that had once gotten away, or so they said. The Boy Who Lived.

He shook his head to clear it, fingers clenching tightly on the glass. Looked at the contact details, black against his fridge.

Hermione said he was breaking. That maybe he just needed someone to talk to about the horrible things he'd seen, to be told that feeling disgusted and frightened and guilty was normal.

What he had wasn't normal.

They knew he could get into the man's head, the whole Auror department exploited it. They didn't seem to realise that it wasn't like flicking through the pages of a book, it was getting sucked straight into the story and feeling everything.

Voldemort did the crimes. *He* did the crimes – and there was no way to say that, to express that, without sounding insane.

He wasn't insane, he just…

The wiring was wrong. Crossed too much with the mind of a psychopath, uncaring of anything but his own desires.

Maybe that was why he'd gotten into working as an Auror in the first place: a sense of needing to compensate for the bloody hopes in his head, the way his pulse quickened guiltily, as if in greeting, when he stepped into Voldemort's gallery of crime.

And he was good at his job.

He needed to keep doing his job unless he wanted to sleep with another victim in his head. He needed to stop Voldemort before the man consumed his own mind entirely, dragged him into a world where he was the one the Aurors hunted. How long could one stare into the abyss, after all? Especially when the abyss stared back so vividly.

And every so often it would return to that one, the worst one. To his parents.

Red hair. Dark hair. And a baby in a crib.

He saved them. He killed them. It all tangled and he hated it.

It didn't even make sense in his head.

Dumbledore had once told him he empathised with Voldemort too much, and maybe that was true. There was no sympathy involved, just the kills as if they were his own.

And he didn't even know who Voldemort really was.

There was never a mirror with which to see himself – see Voldemort – and he always saw it from the man's own eyes.

He drained the glass and set it down.

No mind healer could help with that.

He was like Tom Riddle's magical-muggle psychiatry career. He was unprecedented.

Riddle had been interesting, that was for sure. They'd just talked on the first session yesterday, not about anything in particular, just chatting.

He didn't let his guard down.

He had too many people in his head already to add another, and he wasn't cruel enough to let anyone else crawl their way in either.

It wasn't a nice place to be.

There were some things psychiatrists couldn't fix.

He wasn't broken. There was nothing wrong with his mind to fix, there were no issues to resolve, or no more than most people had, anyway.

He just happened to kill someone in all the ways that counted and festered in his heart every time he walked into certain crime scenes, like the trigger of a gun that never had the safety on.

He had a soul bond with a mass-murdering psychopath.

The last Voldemort crime scene had been the final straw. A boy: his age, dark-haired, so obviously a replacement for the real target – for him – with his heart torn out. In the heart's place was a butterfly, pinned down, still alive, just like a collector would, always still alive when the crime scene was discovered, but never able to fly again.

No, his head wasn't to be messed with, because there truly was something dark there, something he never wanted to face again by poking around.

He decisively burnt the small business card.

Tom Marvolo Riddle was beyond frustrated.

It had been a week – a whole, bloody week – and Harry Potter had yet to turn up in his office again.

He stabbed a knife moodily through his sketch pad, and through the carefully drawn features immortalised on the page.

The boy was supposed to come back. He'd done everything right.

What had he missed?

Was he supposed to give him more time? Another push? He frowned.

He'd been able to feel the boy's emotions since that day – it had been a matter of deduction to work out whose the feelings were, because he didn't see how they could so suddenly be his own.

Even if they felt like it.

Before, the only happiness he'd got, the greatest power and delight, had been when he held a fragile life in his hands with the full knowledge that however much they pleaded, he was going to rip it away.

Wizards were supposed to be gods – and once, in his adolescent years, he'd intended to rule them all as Dark Lord. To make them better, and to rule the muggles too.

But that wasn't true power; he'd found that out with time.

Power was immortality and control, and wizards weren't gods. They were the same as the muggles. Magical, yes, and a step up the ladder, but their thoughts and fears … they were the same. *Weak.*

He'd always been able to see into people's minds; though not quite so literally before he discovered the art of legilimency, manipulation and seeing the patterns had always been devastatingly simple for him.

It was useful, it allowed him to twist the webs of the world to suit his own needs, and while he'd once intended to use it to help them … they didn't deserve his help. They weren't worth his help.

Ironic that he'd carved out this path for himself then. The psychiatrist. The person who helped others. Some said people became mind healers in an effort to diagnose and help themselves, but he was flawless and above them in every way.

If they knew his mind, they would call him a monster and a freak. Maybe he was, but he was the greater creature and their tiny dreams and minds bent beneath his scrutiny and talents.

He fixed them up, he played with their minds, all for the control and the delight of forcing them to face their own fears.

Maybe he was trying to understand them, their stupidity, their common emotions, because it was never anything he had felt himself, before the boy.

Maybe he needed a guise for murder, and maybe he occasionally found gems.

His line of work was fantastic because he got to work with broken minds, interesting minds, minds that came to rely and depend on his assistance so utterly that it was a rush within itself.

And they thought he was *kind*.

He was the Lord of the Shadows; he dictated the darkest aspects of their world and ruled them silently from above mere mortal thrones of existence, as puppet master. His toys, his marionettes, like Lucius

Malfoy smiling and speaking on his strings.

It could be rather *unfortunate* for the man's treatment, if he didn't make the election run smoothly.

Potter still hadn't come back.

Had he known who he really was? Somehow realised? He didn't think the boy had.

No, he couldn't have, or the Aurors would have already been here.

He had to admit, when this soul connection had first been born, his immortality, he'd been sceptical of having the boy's emotions flitting about in his head.

Until he realised how his own emotions were affecting Harry in turn; then it became truly fascinating.

The boy was so good, so in conflict with him, and yet, as shown, still susceptible to repeated conditioning, to his emotions.

He never gave the boy anything bad. He didn't give him anger or further pain – not directly anyway, outside of murdering his parents and then his godfather when the man had got too close to his trophy, but…

No. He gave Harry the happiest moments of his life, spliced into murder and violence in the most confusing, sinful combinations possible.

He'd always loved the rush of power he got from holding someone's life in his hands, and to know that one person shared that love of murder, understood him – however involuntarily – was thrilling.

But the boy hadn't come back.

It wasn't anywhere near as fun if he didn't come back, if he couldn't pick through his head and guide him and fix him and break him and mould him.

His jaw clenched.

Why hadn't he come? Yes, he hadn't liked the thought of a psychiatrist, of people in his…

Oh. He didn't like people in his head. He'd said that himself, hadn't he? That it was common, and indeed it was. But Harry's situation wasn't. His head was beautifully crowded by his own shadow.

He knew exactly what he had to – was that the door?

Harry couldn't believe he had come here again. He'd sworn not to – he didn't even know what was dragging him back. Well, okay, he did. But he consoled himself with the fact that Riddle was a remarkable psychiatrist, and he wasn't here for himself.

It was professional interest, nothing else. The man was a criminologist, after all. He'd talked to the Auror Department about the matter, and they'd agreed that Riddle would be useful to have on board.

The door to the office opened, and the man stared at him for a few seconds, before smiling.

"Harry. Please, come in. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Did he suddenly remember they were supposed to have daily sessions? He withheld that comment, and the venomous bite it was served with, neatly walking over to his desk and sliding his sketchbook into a drawer, locking it with a discreet flick of his wand.

Harry watched his movements curiously, warily.

"How would you psychoanalyse Voldemort?"

Now this could be an interesting development.

He gestured for Potter to take a seat on his sofa again, moving over into his chair.

He didn't work for free, after all…

Chapter End Notes

Butterfly Heart by azure09

Part One: 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"What spurred this on?" Riddle asked. "You seemed rather against my company and the possibility of returning here, last time we talked."

"I'm not here for a therapy session," Harry said tightly. "I'm here because you're supposed to have a reputation as a remarkable psychiatrist and criminologist, and have been known to consult on cases. The Auror Department requested that I talk to you."

"Indeed. I'm also certain that the Department requested that you talk to me about yourself, as opposed to as a consultant on cases."

"Should I take that as a refusal to help?"

"Not at all," Riddle murmured. "But as I told you last time, I don't like to make presumptions and judgements without evidence. I would rather not base this on the no doubt wildly exaggerated media coverage done on the man."

"Oh. Right. Well, I'd offer to take you to a crime scene, but thankfully there are no fresh ones."

And he had no desire to go near one of them anyway. No, worse – he almost did, because whilst he was at the scene he felt wonderful and the ideas sparked through his head like lightning.

It was when he fell back into his own head that he hated it, regretted it, clutched the sides of his sink and threw up in the toilet, even when there was nothing left but to merely retch an empty stomach.

But he did have the photos, in preparation for this.

"I have crime scene photos, if they would help for now."

"Are you recruiting me to do your job?" The man sounded amused. "That's hardly very professional." Was the bastard teasing him?

Harry shoved the glossy pictures over, determinedly not looking at them. Instead, he kept his eyes fixed on Riddle, and for several long moments the psychiatrist just studied him in turn.

Then he took the photos, flipping through and examining them, a veiled fascination in his eyes that may have disturbed some. Harry supposed criminal minds would interest the man.

"Well?" he questioned, after a long silence.

Riddle, to his surprise, moved so he was sitting on the other end of the sofa, spreading the photos out between them.

"I find it interesting that you would need to consult me on this case, Harry. You know everything these pictures are trying to say already, I can tell. You took them, did you not? The photos? Or at least some of them. You know where his focus is."

"I speculate. Psychoanalyse the damn photos in regards to him, and not me."

Riddle continued to appraise him for a moment.

"He's very precise, meticulously so. Every aspect of the crime is planned and premeditated, and arranged for a certain effect. There is a clear link to collecting; the butterfly in the chest is pinned like a collector would, and the way the victim is splayed and pinned to the wall is reminiscent of this as well.

“It could be a larger representation of the butterfly pinned to the heart. Butterflies are often symbolised with resurrection and so immortality, along with metamorphosis. I could also go further and make literary connections to iconic butterfly symbolism, most notably John Fowles’ 1963 novel *The Collector*. Are you familiar with the story?"

"Man collects butterflies, kidnaps girl and keeps her locked up in his basement. Explores the idea of beauty in freedom and whether the object of desire is still beautiful taken from its natural habitat and pinned down," Harry recited.

"Indeed," Riddle said, almost smugly. "Very good. Ominous though, isn't it? I can see why your superiors would have referred you to me. The pinned position could also be likened to the Vitruvian man as an example of the ideal form, or even to crucifixion and so the sacrifice of the saint by God."

"Didn't realise you were a religious man, Riddle." Harry spoke to cover the jolt that ran through him at that comment – the saint. He wasn't a saint, and God didn't corrupt Jesus, but … no. Voldemort did view himself as a god among men though.

"Tom. My name is Tom, and no, I'm not. Though here I could cite Nietzsche, with his claim that though we are in a time of rising atheism – of which I adhere to – we all have a religious instinct which represents the human desire for something greater."

"Nietzsche also said that he couldn't believe in an all-powerful god existing, because he couldn't believe that such a god wouldn't be himself," Harry said flatly. "Pinch of salt as far as he's concerned."

"Hmm. Voldemort is obsessed with you, but again, you already know that. You've also avoided looking at these photos, and considering your profession it seems unlikely you're squeamish. You've seen plenty of crime scenes, what makes these so special to you?"

"They're not special to me," Harry growled furiously, eyes flashing. How the hell did the man keep turning this on him so insistently? What was the point? He was getting paid for his time either way! "I'd just rather not look at corpses before lunch. It turns the stomach."

"Perhaps. I'm not entirely sure what you and the Ministry are hoping to gain from this consultation, at least regarding Voldemort. I'm sure you know him better than I do."

Harry's jaw clenched.

"Ever heard of a fresh perspective?"

"You're not denying understanding him?" Riddle asked, raising his brows. Harry resisted the urge to curse, instead snatching up the photos and stuffing them into his bag.

"If you're not going to be helpful –"

"I prefer to direct my time and energy to where it is needed, such as to you, rather than him."

"I don't need your help," Harry hissed, shooting to his feet. "I'm not mad!"

"I never accused you of being so," Riddle said calmly. "That doesn't mean that these scenes are not disturbing for you. You wished for me to psychoanalyse Voldemort? Combine the fact that he's a collector with the allusions he's making, his obsessive personality – strong attention to detail in the precision, for example – and then the fact that in his last crime scene the victim was a rather obvious substitute for you, and I think it's very clear where his mind is currently preoccupied.

“A man with such precision to detail would not like loose ends, and the Boy Who Lived is that – in all sense of the words – to a killer such as him. It also makes you rather unique, if just for that fact alone. Oblige me by answering a question, please; in your professional opinion, what does obsession plus collection lead to, in light of what was taken from the victim?"

Harry's fingers furled tightly, nails digging into his palm, as Riddle's gaze remained glued to his face. Bile clawed up his throat, the careful scraps of his composure shaking.

"I'm his ultimate target. I already gathered that."

"Then why are you so bothered about catching him now?"

"Because the bastard's going to hunt me down and rip my heart out!"

"Which should give you ample opportunity to catch him, I'm sure, providing you don't die first. You don't need to hunt him down if he's going to come to you. Regardless, you're missing an obvious point – metamorphosis."

"I – what? Obviously not every possible connection on a crime scene is relevant –"

"It is with him. You know it is. Precise, isn't he? Everything is planned, every possibility explored."

This was getting too close to the topic, and Harry backed away, uneasy. He couldn't believe this had been a good idea – it didn't matter that he'd been compulsorily sent to Riddle to deal with this, to act as a medium for consultation as he wasn't currently in a state that would allow him to be active in the field for this case, he –

"Change of heart, Harry. Stealing of hearts. Obsession. Would be almost romantic if he wasn't murdering for your attention."

Harry stopped, uneasiness draining. Right. That was different from what he'd expected.

It had nothing to do with twisting him onto the wrong side of the law, making him a monster too. Of course, it had been irrational to assume Riddle would make that connection without all the facts, and he was stupid for getting so worked up, but so far Riddle had been managing to come across as eerily omniscient about the whole thing…

God, he needed to wind down, and now he just laughed, a little hysterically.

"That's your diagnosis, doctor? That the man's in love with me? No. How am I the one in therapy if that's the conclusion you came to?"

"You're being very rude."

"But, I mean, come on. Really? Sure, he has a sense of attachment to his victims, but it's definitely not like this. He devours them, their fears and hopes for mercy, their realisation of death when he's so scared of it –" he stopped himself.

Riddle raised his brows. "Again, why are you consulting me if you're the expert?"

Harry's mind ground to a halt again as he spluttered.

"Did you give that whole spiel just to provoke a reaction and prove a point?" he demanded, aghast. "You're a fucking horrible psychiatrist."

"Still being rude …" The words were very delicate, but something about them gave Harry pause, like there was some other quality lurking there.

Riddle had stood now, facing him.

There was something sparking in the air, an almost-danger, but – no, it was gone, there was nothing…

"Sorry, but you can't deny that your methods are unconventional. You could have stirred me to an emotional breakdown, pulling a stunt like that!"

"Sometimes it is easier to build a demolished building up, than to try and plug the cracks in its foundation."

Harry frowned.

"What the hell are you trying to say?" he bristled.

"To use the cliché, the first part of healing is acceptance," Riddle stated simply.

"I don't have a problem!"

"Then why can't you sleep?"

"What?"

"Insomnia tends to be a sign of larger problems and concerns in a person's life. You're wearing a glamour, most notably around your eyes, which is suggestive of an attempt to deflect concern about what would most likely be rather prominent bags around your eyes."

"I hunt killers for a living. A few nightmares and sleepless nights here and there does not mean I need therapy," Harry protested.

"No, but the fact that you can't do your job and bring yourself to look at old crime scene photos is more telling," Riddle murmured. "As is the fact that you're here."

"Professional interest. My supervisor requested I consult you regarding the case."

"Yes, but I don't believe his overall aim was to get me to psychoanalyse the killer. They have the Boy Who Lived for that; my job is to get you back on your feet, fit for duty, and to keep you that way until Voldemort is caught."

"You're very blunt for a psychiatrist," Harry muttered. "Aren't you supposed to be going to great extents to pretend this is all just friendly conversation?"

"I wouldn't insult your intelligence in such a manner. As I said in our first session, I'm here to help you solve your own problems, not to fix them for you. You can pretend this is all just friendly conversation if it helps, though. This is mere obligation to you at the moment; you're feigning the

motions of helping yourself, rather than actually doing so. Yet it is more than clear that you don't like the state of mind you are in, so I must admit I'm curious as to your reluctance. I presume you already know my job requires an oath of confidentiality?"

"If I don't want you in my head, I'm not going to answer that particular question, am I?" he returned.

Riddle's lips twitched. "I suppose not. You can relax, Harry, you're safe with me."

"Perhaps you should go back to psychiatry school then, because I'm not worried for myself."

"You believe I can't handle the dark things in your head? Perhaps you would allow me to be the judge of that, before you block the whole world out?" Riddle suggested evenly.

Harry just shook his head.

"Find another project to label and another broken little sparrow to fix. I have no use for it," he said curtly, turning away. "Thank you for your time, Doctor Riddle."

"My, if I give you the courtesy of assuming intelligence, perhaps you should allow me the same?" Riddle called after him. "I would never refer to you as a broken little sparrow."

Harry came to a stop at the door.

"What would you refer to me as, then?" he asked.

"A honey badger. Sounds cute and relatively harmless, like something you'd want to take home. Like the prey. In reality, a honey badger is incredibly tough, vicious when attacked, and capable of taking out prey much larger than itself."

Harry stared, uneasy all over again, and Riddle offered him a small smile.

"I'll expect to see you tomorrow, Harry. We can do lunch."

Rufus Scrimgeour really wasn't sure what to think of the current state of the Auror Department.

It was very different from what he was used to, traditional methods mixed with the infiltration of more muggle techniques. Not that they weren't useful, but nonetheless.

Their greatest asset and liability however was still Harry Potter.

He'd snatched the boy up, straight from Hogwarts, despite Dumbledore's warning that Potter shouldn't be allowed so close to the Voldemort case.

He didn't understand.

All he knew was that the boy was brilliant at making connections, especially those that involved Voldemort. He was a natural!

Of course, with time, he noticed the health issues starting to creep in, the way Potter would just freeze in the middle of those crime scenes, his eyes glazing over as he moved around the room in a gait very different to his own. It was far more confident, elegant – the sort of elegance and grace he normally only saw on Potter when he was on his broom.

It was a little unnerving to watch, he would admit, and dangerous to snap the recruit out of before he was ready. When he was ready, he'd go very pale, glance down and examine his hands as if he was looking for something different, before opening his mouth to give a detailed account of what happened and why, voice clipped as he recounted motivations, observations – things none of the others on the scene had noticed – his words pouring out, tumbling over each other to convey all sorts of symbolism and analysis and interpretations and implications and –

Then he'd walk out.

At first, it would work well, but now…

He didn't quite know what it was, though Potter had once said something along the lines of 'You don't understand what being in his head is like', but now … now the Auror would adamantly refuse to set foot on a crime scene.

Robards had once seen the boy absently spend half an hour washing his hands in the sink, until the skin was red and scalded.

Harry Potter was breaking even if he wouldn't admit to himself, he would spend longer and longer silently stalking around the crime scene before he started talking about it, and Rufus got the overwhelming suspicion that the other was keeping some facts and observations to himself.

It wasn't that they didn't have plenty of other talented Aurors and recruits on the case, or the aid of consultants on such high-profile murders, but … Harry Potter was the best. He did it in half an hour, with the most astonishing leaps of thought from the evidence.

That was why he assigned him to Riddle. The man had a long history of helping out on cases, and an esteemed reputation. If anyone could fix Potter and help him, it was Riddle.

Besides, he was sure the man could be of great help with his own observations, if Potter was refusing to cooperate on the matter.

He didn't know what, exactly, was wrong with the boy, but he knew there was something there – something dark that he would ignore for the sake of justice and the greater good in this endless war of terror and crime.

It would all work out in the end.

It was just a matter of how damaged Potter would be, when all was said and done.

Tom was rather delighted with how this day had turned out, in the end.

Harry had come back. He knew he would come back.

First, he would gain the boy's trust, and then he would continue planting seeds of his own. He would possess Harry's heart and mind and soul in its entirety – it was rightfully his, after all.

His property. His Horcrux.

It was a shame, in a way, because Harry would make such a beautiful crime scene, but alas, he needed to be protected.

And, if he was his and him already, then he might as well complete the transformation.

An assistant in murder, someone to talk to, gloat to, didn't sound bad at all.

A partner in crime, in the most literal sense of the word.

And if not that, well, it was adorable playing with Harry's psyche.

He debated what to make for lunch tomorrow, and his next actions, as he walked down the street with his grocery shopping.

Something light, fish perhaps, with a fruity white wine?

Venison. Venison was good. He'd bought some venison, delicious, succulent. Venison it was.

He'd always enjoyed cooking. Whilst most of his contemporaries had house elves to take care of it, he found his tastes more … particular than that. Besides, it was relaxing, and he liked the control he had over the meal.

He was very careful about what he let near him and around him.

Not everyone was worthy of his presence, and those who refused to yield and show the proper respect to a wizard of his power, intelligence, and caliber were the worst.

What would go well with the venison?

Potatoes, in a creamy sauce?

Splendid.

Or was that too formal? Perhaps he should save the venison for dinner, and make something that was more snack-like.

He did like venison though, and he didn't want to come across like he had poor taste.

He hoped Harry brought more crime scene photos; he got such a thrill seeing his murders from Harry's perspective. He paid such flattering attention to the details.

It was nice to know his work was appreciated.

Chapter End Notes

Another fanart by Amnrzh

Part One: 4

"Wow, this is … impressive," Harry murmured, staring at the spread in front of him. "If I'd known therapy involved feeling like I was dining at the Ritz, I would have started ages ago." He paused. "Though I suppose the prices are similar. Seriously, you charge a fortune."

"People pay for the quality they want," Riddle returned lightly.

Harry's lips thinned. "True. But it should be more that they get the quality they deserve."

Riddle gestured for Harry to sit down at the table that had been pulled into the normal consultancy room. "Perhaps, but nonetheless our world is ruled by money and not by sentimentality, however much the Beatles would declare otherwise."

Harry snorted involuntarily in amusement as he took his seat, looking up to see something tiny flicker in Riddle's expression.

"Aren't you supposed to be encouraging me to think happy, optimistic thoughts and not express such cynicism at the state of the world?"

"Would you believe me if I did advocate such a worldview, considering we both know of the monsters that lurk in the dark? But of course, Harry. I can oblige. Voldemort, you see, was just a misunderstood, tragic little boy and maybe if he'd been hugged more as a child, he would be doing my job as an upstanding member of society instead."

"Oh god, you're awful. Stop it. You can't make jokes like that – it's obscene! He's a mass murderer!"

"And yet you appear almost amused. Maybe we'll find ourselves getting on sometime." Riddle tipped his glass a little as if in toast to that, before setting his wine down and leaning over to serve up the food. "You can't look into people's minds for a living without gaining a grim sense of humour."

Well, he supposed that was true, even if the reference to going into people's minds made his insides twist. He knew Riddle didn't mean it that way, but … hell. He managed to slip enough such comments in, inadvertently, for it to jolt him every so often.

He tried some of the meat, feeling the flavour melt in his mouth.

"Taste alright?"

Harry swallowed. "It's delicious," he mumbled, receiving a smile in response as Riddle tucked into his own meal. "Where did you learn to cook? And what is this, anyway; I don't recognise the taste?"

"Venison. And I taught myself, during my travels. I've always enjoyed the finer aspects of life and culture, so I made it a personal mission to pick up a new recipe wherever I went."

"You've travelled a lot then? Colour me jealous, I've never even left the UK. There's always been –" He looked down at his plate. "… er, other stuff."

Voldemort. People trying to kill him.

"I can imagine. Maybe I'll take you for a restful hunting trip with me sometime."

He was being teased again, wasn't he?

"Yes, I can imagine that. 'This is my mental patient who's apparently traumatised by seeing lots of people get murdered, so I took him with me to a horror-movie cabin in the woods so I can kill more things in front of him,'" Harry said dryly.

"You mean that doesn't sound like an effective treatment? Shocking. Regardless, I wouldn't want you in the woods. You would no doubt attract another serial killer and ruin my holiday."

Despite himself, Harry felt a laugh burst past his lips.

"I don't know how you get away with this. Bloody hell." He shook his head. He suspected Riddle was doing it to put him at ease with banter, especially the morbid sort of banter that was most likely intended to make him more comfortable with wandering into more serious discussions involving death and guts. He changed the topic again, sipping some of his wine. "What's the best place you've been?" he asked.

"Depends what you want to visit for. I would be hard-pressed to pick," the other stated. "If you could go anywhere, where would you want to go?"

"I don't know. Never really been anywhere before, so it's probably not the most interesting question you could ask me. A famous city, I guess. Paris, Rome, Venice …"

"Not a nice beach hideaway somewhere?"

"What, to be left alone with my head? No thanks. I wasn't joking about the horror-movie aspect of a cabin in the woods."

"The Shining. Go mad with your thoughts and isolation and try to murder me?" Riddle raised his brows.

"Something like that."

"What is it about your own mind that scares you so?"

"And we're back to the psychoanalysis. Cut it out," Harry growled, shoulders hunching as he tensed up all over again. He determinedly took another sip of his wine. "Why can't you just believe me when I say you won't like it in my head?"

Riddle continued to eat, chewing carefully, before sipping at his own wine.

"Not allowing me to help you won't make your problems disappear, Harry. They'll still be there, festering for as long as you flinch and refuse to confront them, growing in the back of your mind like an infestation. You're going to have to face them someday; the question here is do you want to have to do it alone? Or with someone like me, who can pull you out if it gets to be too much?"

Harry swallowed, staring at the table. So much for a nice lunch.

His fingers tightened on the cutlery. "I can't."

"Can't or won't?"

"Can't," Harry repeated. "If you spend as long building defences as I have, then they're not so easy to lower."

"You built your fences mistakenly," Riddle murmured, and he could feel the man's eyes burning into his forehead. "Fences keep people out, yes, but they also keep things in, and I think that might be part of the problem here? It is, or so I've gathered, your own mind you're afraid of, and not an external force?"

"It's complicated."

"Then explain it to me."

Harry's jaw clenched in frustration. He hadn't slept last night either, and how could he just talk about it without seeming like the biggest freak in the world? He wasn't a freak. He was normal! He was – he just – he had abnormal circumstances!

"I – I feel the things he does. Sometimes. There's a connection between our minds. Mine and … Voldemort's. It's how I can understand him so well."

"I thought it might be something like that."

Harry's eyes widened at that and his head snapped up.

"What? But – how – is there –?"

"It's extremely rare, but it's not unheard of. I know of someone else with the same … issue, and they're functioning with it just fine."

"Who?"

"Client confidentiality …"

"Oh. Right. Yeah. I mean, did they … to a … killer? Not just a normal person?"

"I am not at liberty to say. Apologies."

"Right," Harry mumbled. He felt better though – he wasn't the only one, he wasn't a complete freak! Just an unusual case!

"Did they … you said they were fine? And they weren't the killer?" He hated the hope in his voice. He felt so pathetic.

"I'm offended that you think I would so clearly look into the mind of a killer and let them walk free."

"Riddle!" Harry snapped, frustrated, and the psychiatrist sighed, before reaching over and squeezing his hand gently.

"They were better than fine, I promise."

Then he pulled back, thumb dragging absently across his pulse point and vein, and went back to his food as if nothing had happened and no progress had been made.

Harry was oddly grateful for that. Opening up would still be hard, very hard, and he wasn't liable to let Riddle poke around too much or too fast, but … he didn't know.

It was something to think about.

"Why did you get into psychiatry?" he asked instead.

"I find the human mind fascinating," Riddle said. "Most particularly, those minds that in some way could be considered abnormal, unique, and different from the herd. I've always found damage to be more interesting than health."

"Surely that would be counterproductive to actually encouraging them to heal?" Harry returned, raising his brows. "We're not your lab specimens, you know, for your amusement."

"Of course not, but helping someone back onto their feet doesn't negate the damage, the experience – it just allows open wounds or infected cuts in the mind to heal over to scars."

"And scars fascinate you? Most people would call them ugly."

"I find them to be a sign of strength. A person with no scars hasn't lived, and a person with many scars is strong for having survived a greater intensity of life and still found the courage to keep walking. Should I assume you adhere more to the view of scars being ugly?"

"Scars are a sign of mistakes. You can live, but if you're good enough, you won't get any significant scars, you'll successfully avoid them," Harry said. He'd never thought of it in Riddle's way before. "Scars are signs of pain and hurt and everything that's gone wrong and all the crap in the world, so yeah, I think suffering is ugly."

"And happiness is, thus, beautiful?" Riddle clarified.

"Yes."

"In that sense, one could assume you equate beauty with innocence, for it is only the fully innocent – and not necessarily the pure of heart either, by that definition – who remain unsuffering and untouched by the world. Notably, perhaps only a few very small children would qualify, because by that criterion, everyone else would hold some scar or guilt and would, thus, be ugly."

"What? No," Harry protested. "I just meant, well, someone who commits evil can't be beautiful, can they?"

"And what of being a victim of evil? Would someone who had scars from abuse, for example, not be considered beautiful in your eyes?"

"Of course they would, that's awful and not true in the slightest, scars don't work that way, I just meant –" Harry's jaw worked with frustration. "I just meant –"

Riddle was silent. Harry cursed him for not offering an answer or better phrasing that he could agree with, instead just watching him as he struggled to clarify himself. "I didn't mean them! Scars are ugly, but that doesn't mean the people who carry them are."

"And what of happy murderers? If happiness is beautiful?"

Harry scowled at the table.

"Murder isn't beautiful."

"And yet, as a whole, humanity is endlessly fascinated with it, and with the distorted glory of dark minds and the confrontation with death involved therein. How exactly do you believe criminology became a topic for study?"

"I'm sorry, are you trying to convince me murder is beautiful? Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so you can't tell me murder is beautiful, and what the hell anyway? I mean, yeah, it's beautiful – it's awesome – that people with scars have survived and are still here, good for them, they're fantastic, but – but that doesn't mean – it doesn't mean –"

Riddle was scrambling his head.

"I'm trying to indicate to you that your worldview is causing you unease, because you have conflicting sets of criteria," the other murmured after a moment. "It is interesting that you said 'I didn't mean *them*.' You hold the world to a double standard: there are things you would forgive others for and would cry in outrage over, such as that a person with scars – be they physical or mental – cannot be beautiful, because you can acknowledge them simultaneously as a sign of strength … and yet, you still say the words, which suggests to me that when you make that judgement, you are not thinking of the world as a whole, of the ideas of damage and scars as beautiful, strong, and powerful in their own right, but only in regards to yourself. You find your own damage and scars and mind repulsive."

Harry opened his mouth to retort against that, furiously, only for it to dry up and for no words to come out.

"I – so what if I don't like my own mind? You know I don't – I don't like the stuff in it when he intrudes. It's messed up. Unless you're going to tell me that feeling like I'm a murderer whenever I step into one of his crime scenes is fucking beautiful?"

"And the fact that you're linked to this man and can empathise with him, unwillingly, makes you …?"

Harry's teeth gritted, and when the hell had this turned into psychoanalysis again?! Sure, he wanted – well, needed rather than wanted – some help, but … bloody hell!

"It makes it my business, not yours," he muttered, swallowing the last of his venison. "Do you bribe all your clients with lunch?"

"Just the ones who look like they would appreciate a decent meal. Others get a rubix cube, or a pen and paper, or whatever I think would aid them most. I've found a lot of people find it easier to have a talk if they have something else to concentrate on or do with their hands, to some extent," Riddle said, eyes gleaming with mild amusement.

"… are you saying I look starved?"

"You may choose to think of it as 'I like your company', if it makes you feel less self-conscious," the psychiatrist smirked. Harry glared.

"And you accuse me of being rude –"

There was a knock at the door, and Riddle's eyes moved over. He took another sip of his wine, before standing. "Excuse me a moment."

He went to the door, but stopped when it opened right before he reached it, Ron bursting in impatiently. Harry noticed Riddle's eyes darken, just slightly.

Impolite to burst in? The man did seem to have a thing about proper manners.

"Sorry," Ron shot aside to Riddle, a little dismissively, his eyes fixing on Harry. "Scrimgeour sent me, we've been looking everywhere for you. There's been another murder. He's asking for you to come."

Part One: 5

Harry stared at Ron for several long seconds.

"Scrimgeour has other recruits," he stated, a horrible feeling twisting in his stomach. But his boss had one particular crime scene that he always insisted on him seeing. *Voldemort's.* "Why does he need me? I'm supposed to be on a break from active duty."

He glanced at Riddle, and he didn't even know what he was looking for – some comment that he wasn't allowed to go, to bail him out of this, 'Psychiatrist's orders'? Surely, if Riddle was his therapist, which apparently he was whether Harry himself bloody well agreed to it or not, he should be saying something and not getting him caught up in this damn crime scene?

It clearly wasn't helping his mental health, was it?

He could feel a sick thrill of fear-anticipation in his gut, and hated the fact it wasn't solely disgust. He swallowed thickly, his breathing already just a tad heavier than before.

His gaze darted back to Ron as the redhead replied, and he could feel Riddle's eyes resting on him in turn.

"It's – we think it's one of Voldemort's."

Oh god, he knew it. He scrubbed a hand across his face, but wouldn't allow himself any further reaction.

His hands didn't shake.

For fuck's sake, maybe they would let him out of it if they could see his hands shake, and the cracks around the edges.

"There are other agents," he repeated.

"Harry, come on," Ron said. "You know you're the best we have. Scrimgeour asked for you –"

"Scrimgeour also put me on fucking psyche-evaluation with him," Harry hissed, jerking his head at Riddle, eyes wild. Something must have changed. Or maybe he was just convenient. He didn't know. He sucked in a sharp breath.

But people were dying. Innocent people. He didn't want to go – he did want to go – but he didn't. He definitely didn't.

"Can't you just take pictures and show me?" he continued, almost mumbling out the words. "You know … you know it's not as, uh, bad then …"

"I'm just the messenger," Ron said sympathetically – and god, he hated the pity in his best friend's eyes. He didn't want pity! Pity wouldn't stop the slippery precipice from crumbling beneath his feet. He wouldn't be looking at the abyss anymore then, he'd be tumbling straight into its waiting mouth to be devoured and consumed. "You'd have to talk to Scrimgeour."

He glanced at Riddle again, and refused to acknowledge the silent, screaming, hidden desperation in his own eyes.

"I'll be with you every step of the way, Harry. I'll help you," Riddle murmured, pressing a cool hand to his shoulder.

That wasn't the response he was bloody well looking for!

He wanted to go back to awkward psychological conversations and lunch, it was better than this, better than the way the walls were closing in on him and Voldemort and the looming crime scene and –

"Hey, hey, easy." Riddle's hands moved to cup his jaw, steadying him. "Just breathe, okay? Follow my breathing pattern, it's alright."

He jerked his head away, heart skittering through his chest, smiling tightly.

"'Course it is, I mean, just another fucking dead body," he said, forcing his tone to something dry.

He wasn't broken. He wasn't too messed up by this. He wasn't shattering – he wasn't! He wasn't some trembling coward who felt like he might throw up or pass out at the thought of doing his damn job, he was a Gryffindor, he was a – he was a honey badger, not a frightened little sparrow in need of something bigger to protect him.

He straightened his posture, jutting his chin up.

"Let's go, then."

Tom Riddle stared at the crime scene with concealed fury and ice in his veins.

Copycat. Someone had the audacity to try and copycat him. Him! He, who was so above petty crime that they couldn't even hope to compare. And it was so sloppily done too…

It was appalling work. They missed the entire point.

They had some of the aspects down, but it was like looking at a parody, or a terrible movie adaptation. It certainly didn't do him justice.

More so, they thought they could infringe on his territory, pervert and appropriate his name and reputation … for this?

They said that imitation was the highest form of flattery, but this was like a toddler trying to paint the Mona Lisa with broken crayons.

It was all wrong.

Perhaps to an outsider it might seem like one of his, with the victim pinned and splayed – whilst he had no need to stick to an MO, it was useful in making them underestimate him – but the details screamed out the differences. Besides, Harry would be able to tell in seconds if it was him or not, with the gifts he left the boy.

His eyes moved to Harry now, his only solace and point of sanctuary in this crime. He didn't commit crimes, he created art – and *this* was a crime. It was disgusting.

He saw Harry's brow furrow, even as the rest of the Aurors scurried about the scene like rats.

"It's a copycat," the boy said, and everyone glanced at him.

"What?" someone asked.

"A copycat." Harry seemed far calmer now, now that he knew he wasn't about to have his emotions played with and could instead just keep himself at a distance – and Tom immediately had the intense desire to watch the boy at one of his own crime scenes. It would be delicious. He'd have to orchestrate something to make up for this awful travesty.

Of course, he'd known before they arrived that it wouldn't be his, but he hadn't expected it to be this … bad.

"How do you know?" Robards demanded, and wasn't that an idiotic question? It was painfully obvious. Even if they apparently couldn't see the magnificent precision and beauty in his kills, they should have at least had the brain capacity to notice Harry's reaction – or lack thereof – to the scene.

"It doesn't, uh, feel like him," Harry muttered. "And it's a very bad copy."

Exactly. There was a special hell for the bastard who'd butchered his work.

"It's identical to one of Voldemort's scenes!" Dawlish protested.

"No, it's not though," Harry said, voice growing louder. "Voldemort … in some very strange way, respects his victims. This copycat doesn't – they respect Voldemort. All of the focus is on trying to make the scene look as much like one of Voldemort's scenes as possible. Also, the type of butterfly – it's one of those red ones, with the spots that look like eyes …?" Harry trailed off, looking around him. None of the Aurors responded.

This was painful.

"Mimicking a bigger, more dangerous predator," he finished, causing Harry to look at him. "Our copycat is trying to communicate with Voldemort."

"Exactly!" Harry exclaimed.

"He's a fan?" Weasley's brow furrowed. "Great, the bastard has followers now. Just fantastic. It's going to be like a cult of creepy little psychos."

"If he's a fan, he's not one Voldemort would like, though," Harry said. "At least not entirely. Not enough attention on the victim. Voldemort is all about the victim, and their death, and everything their death represents – from the methodology to the positioning to the symbolism of the butterfly. Hell," Harry's voice wavered a little. "Even what the victim looks like sometimes."

"You keep suggesting Voldemort cares for the victim."

"'Cares' is probably the wrong word," Harry corrected. "He's more … you know how you get those people who thank a deer when they kill it? For the sacrifice? It's like that. He's the god and they're the sacrifices at his altar, his purification, his cleansing and destructive plague if you want to get biblical about it."

"What a bloody narcissist," Robards muttered.

"I think we're missing the point," Scrimgeour said tightly. "What's our copycat trying to say to Voldemort?"

Expression blank, Tom took a silent step forward, gliding over the blood-splattered floor. He eyed the body splayed across the bed, soaking the white duvet scarlet. The butterfly was there, pinned, and he stepped forwards, gently pulling the pin out and capturing it in his hands.

"Oi – oi, that's evidence!" Dawlish yelled at him. He barely refrained from shooting the man a withering look.

"Your team has already taken photos and you have pensieve memories. Unless you were planning to keep the creature struggling there for your amusement, I see no issue unpinning it? Maybe you think it's going to fly away?" There was the barest trace of mockery in his tone, skulking beneath politeness.

He ran the pad of his thumb over a delicate wing as it twitched in his hands, and tried not to smile. Still a rush, to have a creature so free in his grasp … and yet, such a tragedy simultaneously.

"He could just be trying to pay respect and homage," Harry murmured, clearly lost in his own thoughts, eyes moving across the scene. "Perhaps he or she feels in some way indebted to Voldemort? The killer's gone to great lengths to research the man and emulate him, even if they didn't get everything right. I mean … they wouldn't necessarily know his motivations and feelings, just their own interpretation of what a crime scene looks like or something. Maybe, I don't know, maybe Voldemort helped them out in some way?"

A previous client? How would they have found out who he was? No, it couldn't be that. They would have contacted him more directly, surely?

"Voldemort doesn't help people."

"He kills people he considers vile and a waste to society, and transforms them into something he finds beautiful," Harry snapped, a sharp edge to his tone now, irritation in his eyes, a gorgeous defensiveness almost. "In his mind, he helps people. In his mind, he makes the world a better place by disposing of the trash … among other things, of course."

He should visit his own scenes more often, Harry more than made up for the sloppiness of this copycat.

Copycat. Ha.

Harry flattered him far more successfully than this killer, this vermin that crawled at his feet like a child begging for attention. It would have been sweet, if not for their lack of respect for their materials and for death itself.

Death wasn't solely a means to an end, it was an end within itself, forever transposed, singular and universal, like a double exposure of symbolism and conclusion.

But maybe he could use this copycat, nonetheless, once he figured out who it was.

Before the Aurors, preferably.

Some of the Aurors still looked sceptical – not quite disrespectful, nor disdainful of Harry's talents, but they didn't understand.

"I would agree, Harry," he said, glancing over at the boy. "From the photos you showed me, this isn't precise enough for Voldemort. Actually, he'd probably find it horribly offensive to his tastes."

"Why do you say that?" Proudfoot asked curiously.

Harry looked about as frustrated with all of this as he felt. However much the boy hated his ability to empathise, that didn't mean it wasn't alienating for him when other people consistently failed to wrap their heads around the same concept, especially when the message was so vivid to both of them.

Proudfoot seemingly picked up on it, and continued defensively.

"Well, you make him sound like a narcissist who thinks he's God! Surely he'd be flattered if he knew that someone was trying to be him?"

"When Lucifer tried to play God, or got too proud, God kicked him out of heaven," he returned, not quite coolly. "There can only be one Voldemort … and this killer isn't him. He violates Voldemort's code."

"Voldemort has a code? Harry, you said he didn't care about morals –" Weasley's brow furrowed.

"It's not a moral code," Harry said. "But everyone has things they value, in some sense or another, and if nothing else, Voldemort respects power – be that his own power, or the power in death or whatever else. Riddle's right, Voldemort would find this disrespectful."

"So, theoretically," Dawlish stated, "we could reveal the identity of who this killer is in the papers, and Voldemort would take care of it – or even just display the crime scene photos, and Voldemort would hunt the bastard down for us."

They all stared at him, and the Auror shifted uncomfortably.

"I suppose it is a possibility," Scrimgeour replied stiffly. "But we do not encourage such things."

Harry was still walking around the crime scene, studying it.

"Unless, of course, we found the copycat first and used him as bait," the boy murmured. "Two birds, one stone … though I doubt Voldemort would be so stupid as to fall for it. You already know I think he's probably a highly intelligent man, and a powerful wizard. No, the issue here is what they're trying to tell Voldemort. Is it just 'I'm a fan', or is it something more?"

It was something more. He'd already figured that out, but it did little to soothe the offense.

His eyes moved over the butterfly in his hands.

"Doctor Riddle, what do you think?" Scrimgeour asked.

"I think you should be asking Mr Potter that," he murmured, causing Harry's eyes to snap to him.

"What? Oh for god's sake, stop reading into everything I do."

Well, Harry read into everything he did, he was just more conscious in his performance.

"You have an idea though, don't you?" he returned.

Harry hesitated.

"It's not even a proper idea, it's just … I said, earlier, that they could be paying respect to Voldemort through this, or trying to. Homage. But that would indicate he helped them previously, but it … the

butterfly … can I see it?"

Harry came over to him, fingers slipping over his as he carefully cupped the creature in his own hands.

"Yeah. Eyespots. Er, like Riddle said, they're used to come across as a more dangerous predator to try and reflect attackers away – that could suggest that he thinks Voldemort is the bigger predator who he is mimicking with his set up, in which case there would be an indication that the killer is seeking protection from something.

"But, well, I've been researching butterflies ever since they first started appearing, and they're also used for … mate recognition. Like with peacocks, for example, this whole scene is just screaming 'look at me.' And they took the heart." Harry glanced at him. "Stealing a heart."

"Wait, what, you're saying this killer's in love with Voldemort?"

"They're a very intense fan, but yes. In some manner. They want to impress him, and, well … frankly … you know when a kid mimics someone they really respect?"

"You think he's asking for mentoring," Tom concluded.

"Possibly."

"He?" Scrimgeour leapt on the pronoun. "What makes you think it's a he?"

"Voldemort largely goes for male victims," Harry shrugged. "He'll attack females sometimes, but he's got a generally masculine preoccupation. Not that he won't switch, but his preference is men."

"Planning to go into protective custody?" he asked, causing Harry to stare at him in surprise.

"What?"

"Well, Voldemort's mentoring you, and has his attention on you at the moment. You're competition," Tom continued.

Harry's eyes widened.

"Shit."

The boy looked sick all over again. He stepped forward, rather satisfied by the effect of his words, even if he meant them as a rightful warning too. He steered Harry towards the exit.

"I'll presume you have everything you need from my client now, Mr Scrimgeour …"

Part One: 6

Tom watched as Harry paced around the room. He'd have to leave the boy soon to deal with some of his other clients, but, for now, he was content to observe.

He was worrying his bottom lip as he thought, pink-red mouth against white teeth, pulling at the softness, leaving behind the slightest indents that fade like the tines of a fork in meat.

"What are you thinking?" he interjected, quietly, after some time. Harry's eyes unglazed, focused - on him.

"How would the killer be certain that Voldemort would get his message? Regardless of debate about the content of the message itself it's useless if he wasn't sure Voldemort would receive it."

"And so?" he prompted, internally delighted that Harry was already starting to be so receptive to his presence and intrusion - perhaps not to his innermost thoughts yet, but his processes nonetheless.

"He would have had to have some way of knowing Voldemort would get it, or at least of tracking his crime. That suggests a connection to the Aurors, or at least the Ministry."

Clever boy.
He already had his suspicions now on the identity of the copycat, but...well. Why not indulge Harry and watch his mind work around the puzzle? It was delicious.

"A valid conclusion," he praised.

"But that still couldn't make him certain Voldemort would get the message, unless he knows something that we don't."

Interesting point that, and the only aspect he was still musing over himself in this whole scenario. He once again had his suspicions though.

"Leap of faith? He clearly doesn't have Voldemort's precision, and so it would not be unusual for him not to have planned this down to the small details," he suggested.

"No," Harry's brow furrowed. "He would want to make sure. He wouldn't just put it down to faith and chance, he's gone to an extreme amount of effort to make contact, he wouldn't let it go to waste."

He said nothing, and Harry continued pacing in his small office space. He himself was sat down neatly on the only chair, easily able to ignore the crime scene photos tacked around him.

"He knows who Voldemort is? If he did, then he would have contacted him directly," Harry murmured, to himself. "This doesn't make any sense!"

"Perhaps you're not looking at all the factors," he suggested. Harry shot him a glance.

"Do you know something I don't?"

"Most likely," Tom smirked, gently. "Did you know that in human behaviour there is this occurrence called inattention blindness? We can't perceive large unexpected shifts in our overall field of vision when we are concentrating on certain facts?"

"Don't distract me, seriously - oh. Other factors. Not just Voldemort. I'm focusing too much on Voldemort and on the crime scene..." the boy was pacing more frustratedly now, hands tugging through his hair. "Factors," he muttered, under his breath. "Other factors. Possible target. Competition."

"To quote Doctor Who; a door once opened can be stepped through in either direction," he offered.

Harry came to an abrupt halt, so still that he was almost quivering on the spot.

"If he knows I can feel stuff from Voldemort, then he might assume Voldemort can get stuff off of me. The killer would have to be high up in the Ministry or hell, in this department for that, to know about, uh, me...or at least have connections therein." Harry looked at him again, more closely this time. "Do you have a thing against just telling me the answer or what you're thinking?"

"You know my methods. I help people help themselves." Something flicked in the other's gaze. "What?"

"What if one of Voldemort's victims was someone who caused trouble for this killer? Inadvertent help." He suspected that wasn't all on Harry's mind though, in that remarkable mind that understood him so well. Clever, clever boy.

"Perhaps. It's worth exploring the previous victimology for a link."
He cast a Tempus Charm to check the time, before letting the numbers vanish.

"You heading off?" Harry asked.

"I have another client. You can contact me if anything comes up."

"Right. Yeah. I'm fine anyway."

"Of course. I'll meet you for dinner."
He made his way out and disapparated, to the sound of Harry protesting that he didn't need to be coddled and fed like a child.

Harry continued to pace his small office space, eyes fluttering over crime scene photos, trying not to look at them too closely now.

As if he needed to, when the scenes seemed scarred on his mind either way.
Nonetheless, he felt...he wanted to say that he felt better that it hadn't been Voldemort, that he'd spared the ensnaring emotions which dragged him closer to darkness and swallowed him from every side with the softest of shadowy caresses.

On the same time, it was wrong to say he was disappointed, it was sick, but...he didn't know. Sometimes, it felt like feeling Voldemort's emotions was the only time he felt happy nowadays.

God, maybe he really did need professional help.

He didn't know how long he worked for, wearing out the floorboards he was working on, growing increasingly tired. He forewent dinner, too preoccupied with trying to figure this all out, with the hints that he'd been given, but unable to slot them into a coherent order. He tried to think of everyone in the department, but he couldn't think of a single one of them who would willingly betray him.

Was it maybe an old member of the department? Or perhaps a friend of somone who was currently working on the Voldemort case or - hell anyone who knew him, and might talk about him at home.

He didn't know.

Bt it wasn't like he had advertised his ability to see into the mind of the most notorious serial killer of their age, or whatever it was that Voldemort was.

Some people called him a rising dark lord, and there were all sorts of theories about how he was actually killing people who were against his cause, whatever his cause was, and disguising his murders as random.

Whilst Voldemort was undeniably narcissistic enough to want to be a Dark Lord, what he knew of the murders just didn't ring right. He'd already established that Voldemort murdered mostly those who he found undesirable and transformed them into a form he found more appealing, or at least to ensure they served a greater purpose.

He didn't know. None of this really made sense to him, it still felt like there was something he was missing.

Alastor Moody? He couldn't imagine him giving anything away. Ron would never willingly talk about his crap, but might have blurted something out...same with many of his colleagues actually, if they didn't consider the person they were talking to a threat.

Thicknesse was a possibility, but he didn't know the man well enough, and the man didn't know him, though he supposed the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement may still be privy to such information.

Scrimgeour wouldn't say anything.

He couldn't exactly interrogate his whole department without raising further suspicion.

He frowned, rubbing at the headache he could feel building between his temples, and kept pacing, trying to connect the dots.

It was easy to get into Voldemort's head, the man grabbed him in a chokehold and forced him to see his perspective, but...

No. He couldn't.
He had the thoughts of one murderer in his head already, he didn't need another.

Tom stared at his client with a carefully neutral expression on his face.

Dolores Umbridge was sitting on his couch.

He'd only had three sessions with her so far, and he believed from the first that she'd only sought help because apparently he was 'in'. Apparently it was growing fashionable among the higher end purebloods to see him, and other's he believed came out of some stupid fantasy or crush. She believed coming to these meetings would make her seem 'deeper'.

She was vile. Very sour inside, despite her 'cuddly' exterior as he peered at him with big eyes that she forced to well up with crocodile tears.

People gave him their heart and soul in these sessions, she was an insult to his profession, and he'd already been insulted once today.

"It's just so difficult," she sniffed. "The world is so...messy. It's disgusting. Sometimes I feel like I can't even leave my front door. Is it so horrible that I need order?"

"The desire for order and structure in one's life is a very normal desire," he replied. "However, being too rigid is...unbeneficial. It leads to unnecessary stress and anxiety, and hinders the even more human ability to adapt."

He would have been more sympathetic to her world view, he was sure, if she wasn't one of the revolting specimens that he would commonly destroy.

She didn't seem to listen to a word he said.
"I stand firm to my principles, Dr. Riddle, and I do not understand why everyone seems to vilify me for doing so. I do not believe it is my fault that their opinion is wrong."

"You believe they deserve to be punished for their worldview?"

"When they bring...filth into the world, yes, yes I do."

"Would you apply this to yourself?"

"Excuse me?" her voice turned honeyed and sweet, and he watched her calmly.

"You said you do not understand people who vilify you, and yet you believe that those who hold a different opinion from you should be punished."

"Those who hold the wrong opinion. Oh, you can preach a more subjective world to the view, of course, but everyone knows that there is a right way to be and a wrong way to be."

She sniffed again. He said nothing. She glanced at him.

"Don't you agree?"
After a moment, he smiled, leaning forward.

"I think I have just the solution to help you, Dolores. Would you like to follow me to the other room?"

Harry was sitting at his desk now.
Everyone else had long since gone home to their families or lovers or pets, but he was still staring at crime scene photos and sifting through ministry files.

He was looking through Voldemort's victims so far - or at least the ones they knew about.
It was an odd mix, somewhere between those he killed solely for what were listed as the 'Butterfly crimes', which he committed because he believed they were a taint on the world - and then there were others which they were less sure about. Maybe they'd done something to irritate the man, but they weren't caught up in any particular scandal that they were aware of.

His parents hadn't done anything wrong.

He rubbed his eyes, exhausted, the offices silent around him, with the only light emerging from his cubicle.

He didn't know how late it was anymore, and his stomach was vaguely growling in hopes of dinner and something to drink.

He couldn't relax enough to do so, and his home in all of its quiet emptiness seemed equally daunting. Of course, it was extremely well warded, and he'd been living with the threat of Voldemort for a long time now (though the 'blood wards' had protected him before) but nonetheless.

If he was expected to be anywhere, it would be there, and he didn't know.

He felt like a pathetic, terrified child being freaked out at the thought of being alone in his own home, but Riddle's words that he was competition, a potential victim...

His hand still wasn't shaking, and for a second the fleeting thought that he would kill anyone who came after him crossed his mind. The next, the bad taste in his mouth lingered.

He turned another page on his notes, and absently considered making himself a coffee.

He felt so close to something, some revelation, some scrap of information that would connect all of this...he just couldn't think of it.

He bit his lip, and the next second he was pacing again.

Harry hadn't gone home.

The lights weren't on - and of course he knew where his horcrux lived. He just couldn't enter, on his own volition...the fidelius prevented that.

But the lack of '12' in a row of streets was rather conspicuous.
He believed Harry inherited the Black House after his Godfather's timely demise in his fifth year, and had promptly moved out of his Aunt and Uncle's home.

That was one good thing, at least - as was the fact that they had moved and Harry had kept no contact with the pigs.

The only thing that had stopped him from immediately killing them was because he didn't want to take the delicious joy of vengeance away from Harry, when he did it. Because he would, eventually. He'd personally ensure it.

His first, unwelcome, thought was that the boy had managed to find trouble again, but he soon pinpointed him to still being working at the office.

No doubt hadn't had dinner either.

Harry really did need to learn to take better care of himself. Maybe a desire for passive-suicide? An easy escape he wouldn't admit to himself? Or the product of sustained neglect. Harry was fast asleep at his desk, his normally closed face open and vulnerable, if a little pinched with troubled slumber.

It was just as well, he'd had a rather nice lunch idea for tomorrow, that he needed time to prepare properly.

He was thinking a nice pate, with some red wine this time - Chianti, perhaps. It would help Harry relax. Alcohol had that effect on people, and had seemed to do the trick at lunch.

Dinner wouldn't have been so special, leftovers from lunch, thrown in with some rice, most likely...assuming he was cooking, that was.

He wandered over, letting his fingers slip gently into the Harry's hair, settling when he only shifted at the touch. The reassuring vibes he was sending the boy probably helped, nails scraping slightly across the scalp before smoothing down along his neck, feeling the other's pulse flutter beneath his fingers.

It would be so easy to stop, especially right now.

He wetted his lips, leaning down, studying carefully, the smell of detergent crisp in his nose, along with fainter scents of rain and something earthy.

He could snap right now, he could ensure Harry remained unconscious even, and take him somewhere else and watch him wake up in panic, restrain him - anything. The possibilities hovered deliciously on the edge of his thoughts, flickering through his eyes.

His fingers brushed Harry's throat, the smooth tan throat, across the adam's apple, before finally growing firm on the boy's shoulder.

"Harry," he said, calmly, giving him the smallest of shake. The Auror immediately jolted awake, nearly falling out of his chair as he scrambled for his wand. He raised his brows as the boy pretty much toppled into a haphazard heap at his feet, before reaching down and dragging him up, keeping a hand steadily on the other's waist even when he was standing, fingers spreading across his ribs and hip.

"I-fuck-Riddle. I...fell asleep?" the sleep haze faded quickly, rather too quickly for his liking, alertness leaping in behind heavy leashes. "Oh, bloody hell, I fell asleep. Sorry. Wait...what are you doing here?"

He looked around his office, before down at Tom's hand, cheeks flushing a little as he took a step back.

"We were going to have dinner. My work overran...as did yours apparently."

Harry rubbed his eyes, and somehow the boy looked younger than ever doing so. The weight had already settled back on his shoulders, eyes pinching with stress and a haunted shadow.

"Right. Yeah. I was onto something?"

"Oh?"

"Mmm. Yeah, the code-" he yawned, muttering another apology. Really, when was the last time Harry had slept properly? He looked exhausted. "He was trying to get a message to Voldemort, yeah? So...what if we respond? You said competition...what if we rile him up? Make him slip up, break pattern."

"Come after you and try and kill you."

"Hazard of the bloody occupation. Voldemort tried to kill me too. Trying. Whichever it is."

"If Voldemort was trying to kill you, you'd be dead."

"Your faith in me is inspiring," the boy snapped, glancing at his documents, gathering them up. Tom watched him for a moment, eyes skimming over the notes, observations and victims Harry had been

cataloguing.

"Come on. I'll take you home," he said, finally. "Maybe a night's sleep will give you a fresh perspective."

Part One: 7

Tom could feel a sense of twisted hope building in his chest as they strode up the street to Harry's house, in Islington.

If Harry invited him in now, he could come and go as he pleased in the warded home, which was undeniably a pleasing thought.

Instead, he was disappointed as Harry paused just outside, turning to him.
"We'll do dinner another time, or something," the boy said.

"I can cook you something now," he returned, with raised brows. "It's no trouble. Or don't you trust me in your house?"

Harry hesitated, before giving an awkward shrug.
"I don't really trust anyone with my home. Never leads to anything good. Maybe another time."

He nodded - it would be too suspicious if he pushed the matter - giving Harry another smile.

"Another time," he agreed, pleasantly. "And don't worry, I understand completely. If Voldemort was targeting me, I would be careful about my security detail too."

Harry gave him a faint smile in response.

The urge that he should have just stolen him when he was sleeping only grew in his chest, though he focused on not letting that particular thought show on his face.

He had to think the long-term gratification here; the question of freedom, of the butterfly. He could take Harry, but then he'd never get to see what the other would become in the wild with his gentle prodding.

No, he clamped down on the urge, letting his hand slip off his wand in his pocket as he clapped Harry's shoulder, as Harry mumbled an agreement to his words.

"You have my number if you need me," he said.

"I won't need you," Harry replied; that stubbornness against Psychiatrists showing through again.

He simply gave him another indulgent smile, because he knew it wouldn't stay like that forever. Harry would need him before the end, he'd make sure of it.

"Just in case," he returned. "Goodnight."

"Yeah, night."
Harry didn't move to enter his home, and he blinked.

"What? Are you waiting for me to leave before? The missing number 12 of your location isn't as inconspicuous as you seem to think it is."

"Why aren't you leaving yet?"

"You have dangerous killer after you, and all sorts of monsters can walk the streets at night. I said I'd get you home safely, I'm merely keeping my word."

Harry snorted.

"What happened to me being a Honey Badger and not a fragile, broken little sparrow? I can look after myself," the boy stated adamantly, chin jutting up in an increasingly familiar defiance.

His fingers twitched in his pockets to reach out, to smudge that expression away, or maybe to capture it, he didn't know. For a second, he fantasised the expression of surprise and shock on Harry's face if he did ever act on his impulses.

Next time, he really wasn't going to be so kind as to wake him so soon.

"Being independent doesn't mean having no one to depend on," he returned.

Harry's brow furrowed at that comment, even as he pulled his jacket tighter around himself on the chilly street.

"And you think you're someone I can depend on? We've barely know each other."

Oh, if only he knew...

"I think I'm someone you can grab onto and use to haul yourself out of dark places when the things you see and feel put you there," he said. "I'm not one of your friends, you do not have to feel concerned about burdening me, and due to my lifestyle I do have an understanding of what you're going through."

"I don't think studying criminology and psychology and occasionally visiting crime scenes quite compares to literally getting dragged into a murderer's head being forced to feel his sadism from a first person perspective," Harry muttered, jaw tightening a little.

He hummed, and kept the smirk off his lips.

"Perhaps not, but I hardly think you intend to use Voldemort as a your crutch?"

Harry laughed at that, seeming to relax a bit, the tension easing from his shoulder, as he shook his head.

"Probably not. He'd much rather see me fall then ever give me a helping hand...or at least, a helping hand which doesn't include helping me become another version of him."
The troubled shadow to his eyes were back.

"You believe that is what Voldemort desires? To corrupt you?"

"I don't know. But butterflies are a sign of metamorphosis, aren't they? You said so yourself."

He was quiet for a moment, and he didn't know if Harry realised the way he was peering up at him with those exquisitely expressive green eyes. He wondered how Harry would look at him if he knew who he was, if he was slowly bleeding out in his arms - pale, lips parted with shuddering breaths, struggling a little in his arms like the butterflies did, twitching in an effort to avoid being pinned.

"That's a concern for another day, or at least once you've had some rest," he said, keeping himself back from encroaching on the smaller man's space. At least for now.

"Do you think he could succeed?" Harry's questioned stopped him as he was leaving, and he glanced back.

"Excuse me?"

"Do you think Voldemort could succeed? Make me like him?"

"I believe everyone has the potential to be a killer, under the right circumstances," he replied - even if that wasn't the reassurance Harry was looking for.

Harry nodded, before turning away.

Barty Crouch Junior was hidden near Number Twelve Grimmauld Place.

It had taken a while, but he managed to track it down. He couldn't get in, regrettably, because of the Fidelius, and he would have attacked then and there if not for the fact Potter wasn't alone.

It wasn't that he had any qualms about involving other people, but he didn't wish to do anything to anger his lord. Lord Voldemort; such an amazing pseudonym. Flight of Death, it was just so fitting.

He longed to meet the man, to learn from him, his artistry, his vision of the world - everything!

Potter just didn't seem to understand Voldemort's magnificence, for, if he could, why would he ever strive to sabotage and catch him? He wasn't worthy of his attention.

But maybe that was the other reason he didn't lunge forward with the intent to take the Auror's heart - he did have Voldemort's attention, and so he had use yet. Besides, it would be impolite to claim his Lord's victim, at least not without checking first.

On the other hand, if Voldemort failed to kill the boy, then he could so himself, serve him and help him. Like an apprentice.

He was sure Voldemort would be a far better father than his own.

He watched as Potter and some other older bloke, maybe in his late twenties or early thirties, discussed something, trying to place the - Riddle, wasn't it? The Psychiatrist.

He wondered what the bastard would have to say about his mental state, and the effect of the Dementor's on a mind.

It was all such a mess.

But he had his plan set in mind, the second Harry Potter was alone and vulnerable, and it would all facilitate his aims perfectly.

They would never catch him; a dead man wasn't on Ministry radars.
He watched as the two disappeared, and contemplated if Riddle wasn't someone he could use to lure Potter to him.

It was all so conflicting, but he knew he wanted the unworthy little brat to suffer for the insult he'd paid his Lord of death.

It was just a matter of time.

He moved back, brushing a beetle off his arm, before disapparating with a crack.

Harry was woken to the sound of an Owl tapping against his window, and scowled, flicking a hand to open it.

He was drenched in cold sweat, with the murders playing through his head all over again.

Scarlet. Vacant Eyes. Joy in his chest.

He scrubbed a hand across his face, rolling out of bed as Pig came over to him, far too hyper for this time in the morning - what time was it anyway?

His mouth felt cottony with the metallic tang of sleep, however uneasy, and his hair plastered to his forehead.

He grabbed Pig tightly in his hand - the bird was still as hyper as ever, and he felt a pang in his gut still that Ron had received the tiny owl from Sirius - to be able to get the letter off.

You need to look at the Prophet. Now.
Sorry.

There was a copy attached, presumably spelled lighter so that Pig could actually carry at it, and he pulled it towards him. For a second, all he could do was stare, utterly numb, mouth running slowly dry.

He read through the article, and it took a few tries for it to actually start making sense, before his fists clenched and the fury burned in his chest.

For fuck's sake!

He was out the door in a hurricane of fury within fifteen minutes.

Tom sat at his breakfast table, eating leisurely before he had to meet his first client for the day, the Daily Prophet spread out next to him.

His expression was blank, though the knife twirled in his hand and stabbed into his sausages rather too viciously for a picture of perfect composure.

How rude. How very, very rude.

Boy-Who's-Going-Dark? The true story between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort

The words flittered through his head as he read them, taking another sip of his tea.

"*Potential corruption*" "*Harry Potter doubts himself*" "*Famous Psychiatrist advocates murder*" "*Why is Tom Riddle at Harry Potter's house?" "Has the Boy Who Lived finally cracked?"*

Rita Skeeter.
Of course.

He could have guessed that from the start.

Whilst the Daily Prophet wasn't a tabloid in the most official sense, Skeeter's vulgar, distasteful and often sensational articles were hardly appropriate to a decent paper.

He wondered how Harry was reacting over this, it certainly didn't do the boy's Golden Boy reputation any good.

Of course, it was unforgivable that she should slander him and try and draw him into a sticky scandal too...but what was to be done about it?

He didn't know why people insisted on behaving in such an unfitting manner around him recently. It was rather irritating. It was time's like these that he thought becoming a Dark Lord may have been the better idea, for no one would dare even mention his name them, yet alone speak of him in such a way.

They would tremble at his feet, and would still.

He hadn't had any cancellations so far; of course not, his clients were too dependent on his help and expertise, but his waiting list had shrunk.

He couldn't say he enjoyed being deprived in such a manner.

His real question was, however, how had she found out?

He hadn't seen her at Harry's house, where the conversation had taken place. Had she bugged the area? He knew he should have raised more wards, but at the time that would only have aroused suspicion on a predominantly muggle street, and their conversation had been innocuous.

Twisted.

Yet another person twisted his wisdom and glory.

His lips thinned, and he folded his paper up.

Of course, he couldn't outright attack her, not in the way he would so desire to. It would only raise questions as to why Voldemort would defend him - though it could be spun into a defense of Harry, but due to certain connections Harry would still know of his own, more personal rage.

His Occlumency Barriers are control were normally impeccable and unshaken even by the most violent exterior intrusions...but there was something about murder, of the sweet rush, that made his barriers drop just a fraction for the emotions to linger on the crime scenes like a graffiti artist's signature tag - just for Harry.

Perhaps, because it was his time of freedom and power, and to be so constrained in his release was to ruin the experience.

Yet, he couldn't exactly let her get away with it, could he? He had some ideas, but-

He headed for the office, and had barely stepped in before a hand was tight at his throat, a wand digging into his gut.

He met a pair of livid emerald eyes.

Wonderful. Just wonderful.

Part One: 8

Harry was sat in the Auror department of the Ministry, feeling like there was a large, cold stone at the pit of his gut.

He ran fingers through his hair, the other cradling his third cup of coffee of the day so far.
He felt like such an idiot for not noticing that someone was near his house - how else could they have known Tom was there and heard their conversation?

It could have been Voldemort, or a copy cat, he was almost lucky it was just Rita bloody Skeeter.

Almost, because she was a bitch, and his life was starting to resemble his nightmares (already informed by life and a certain serial killer) even more so than it did already.

Then he really would have been screwed.

The Auror office buzzed around him, with phone calls to the Daily Prophet trying to clamp down and get a lid on this story. People were talking, but the words just swam in and out of his head like they were issued from underwater, blurred and muffled around the edges.

He could feel the looks people were giving him, uneasy glances which did absolutely nothing to make him feel better either.

It was ridiculous, but he just felt so...alone. Alienated. Even more so now. People of course did their best with his...skillset, and his unnerving ability to walk onto one of Voldemort's crime scenes and know with exacting detail the motivations and reasoning behind the murder.

He was used to being different, and frankly, after an alarming stage when he was fifteen, he saw no point whining or angsting about. It wouldn't make it better, would it?

He just wished they wouldn't doubt him so, even if he knew he couldn't criticize himself when it was so clearly doubting himself. He was in therapy for crying out loud, and most of the department had some awareness of that.

It wasn't good.
Rita Skeeter was a trashy rag and gossip columnist, but she was an immensely popular one nonetheless. He didn't know because, despite her lies, and her often incorrect and slanderous comments, she did also sometimes hit on some rather unnerving spears of truth.

He could sense the idea in people's heads, especially as he couldn't deny his own guilt and concern about the state of his mind and sanity, and couldn't refute that he'd said the words she quoted him as saying.

All it took, sometimes, was an idea - a seed - and people were already thinking of him differently, because what if it was true? Just what if. They didn't turn against him so immediately, though some did, but most didn't, but that seed was there.

He tried to ignore it, vaguely aware of Ron's sympathetic smile, Tonks' attempt to make him feel better, and even Scrimgeour's awkward squeeze on his shoulder.

Maybe his own issues and the fragility of waking, of the blood and the emotions that gushed in the veins of his memory. He pressed his fingers together, dry, slightly tanned and calloused, as he stared at the crime scene photos crowding him from every side.

He didn't want to look anymore.
But he had to.

He'd narrowed his victimology down to people who were linked to Department, and thus far he had the murder of the Bones' some time ago and the death of Barty Crouch. Neither of them seemed particularly viable, but most of Voldemort's kills didn't seem to be in anyway conceivably linked to his department.

Despite his access to the man's mind, he still wasn't always sure how he picked his victims. There was still something of Voldemort's methodology that seemed missing to him, though he couldn't think what it was.

Maybe the key was in the differences in the crime scenes.
In the last two, with the copycat and with Voldemort, it had been the heart missing, with a butterfly pinned in it's place. Another time, it had been the lungs missing with the butterfly pinned on the heart with both sides gapingly empty. It often varied.

He supposed that the body parts were some twisted form of souvenir.
He rubbed his eyes, images popping behind the lids in the darkness, smearing across his vision, lingering even when he opened his eyes again.

It couldn't be Crouch, they were all dead - with the son having died in Azkaban - but he could hardly see the copycat being Susan Bones either. He'd been at Hogwarts with her, she was lovely, kind. She wouldn't do something like this.

He supposed he could say that about everyone though.
The only person he'd even considered capable of doing something like this was Snape, and that was just because he hated the creepy, greasy-haired git.

He suppressed a sigh, trying to think. He'd been so sure he'd find something here, but it just seemed like one dead end after another.

Time to look at the crime scenes again.

Tom studied the smaller man in front of him for a split second, brow furrowing a little.
He didn't...smell right.

Something was wrong here. Nonetheless, he didn't hesitate before twisting in one quick movement so the Harry-look-a-like was the one pinned.

"Polyjuice is an interesting potion," he murmured, watching as those green eyes flared in panic. Still, the possibilities ran through his mind either way...someone who looked exactly like Harry, but wasn't Harry. Of course, the inconsistencies, such as the scent, was itching beneath his skin in the most irritating way. "It mimics the appearance directly, even changes the vocal cord and voice to some extent, but even our world it is extremely difficult to get an exact copy of the original, especially in the case of our I'm going to assume mutual acquaintance, Mr Potter."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Riddle," the imposter began, eyes narrowing, wand clattered on the floor so he couldn't confirm that it would not be eleven inches of Holly. "Look, I know you must have told the papers-"

"-don't test my patience." His head tilted, as he examined the man, or presumably man, considering why he would have attacked him so obviously. He, for want of confirmed pronoun, hadn't expected to get caught, that much was evident. He'd been aiming to use the advantage of Harry's appearance to overpower him, but why pin him?

Power, control. The imposter wanted to see the presumed fright in his eyes. Sadistic. A slow smile spread across his lips. Pity this con-man inadvertently found the larger predator in his scheming.

He obviously felt the need to hide his own appearance, not only for the surprise, but perhaps because he did not have the physique of someone who could walk by unnoticed and slip around as they pleased?

How interesting.
"I think you and I should have a little chat, don't you? Why don't you step into my office?"

This was going to be fun.

"Tom?"

He paused as the voice called out from the other room - and that really was the beauty of his warding. He could hear everything from his office from here, but nothing from here could be heard from his office. Which was just as well.

He gently peeled off his bloodied gloves, ignoring the glazed, agony-filled green eyes staring up at me.

He saw no point in pushing the imposter's real identity when the Polyjuice - he was pretty sure it was Polyjuice Potion - would eventually wear off anyway. He could have so much more fun in the meanwhile.

He'd bought a bottle of the cheap aftershave Harry used - it smelt tacky too, like something that came with a picture on the bottle rather than a more refined and elegant presentation, and poured it on his victim simply to stop the jarring contrast between appearance and all the markers of wrongness.

Whilst he understood the concept of serial killers using surrogates for their golden ticket victim, the prize at the end of it all, he never really saw the point in that if the differences were so obvious that they screamed out and shattered the fantasy.

If he was going to amuse himself in such a way, then it deserved to be done properly.

That, and he'd always been fascinated to see the effects of scarring and wounds and damage caused when someone was under polyjuice.

Would the wounds transpose directly to the true form, in the same place as represented on them when under polyjuice? Would the scars change place? Would they be there at all?

From a scientific point of view, it was all very fascinating.

Nonetheless, he let the gloves drop to the side, gave his victim a pleased smile, removed his special over-robe, checked there were no blood splatters on his suit (of course not) and proceeded to the next room and to the real version of Harry after a last, appreciative glance.

The imposter may have reverted to his natural form by the time he returned, so he made sure to commit the scene to memory.

If it hadn't been Harry at his office door, the real Harry, he would definitely have pretended that he wasn't in.

He walked through the door just as the boy seemed about to leave again, looking awkward.

"Harry," he called out. The other turned, blinking with surprise, before his eyes moved to the door Tom casually shut behind him.

"Oh, sorry. Were you with a patient?"

"Just cleaning up after a session with one. Your presence is no trouble," he replied, studying the boy carefully.

Harry nodded his acknowledgement to the words, hands stuffed into his pockets.

Another reason why his imposter had been so obvious - whilst Harry could attack on necessity, and, he was certain, with utter ruthlessness and precision and boldness - the boy was an Auror.

He would never had sought out the fear in his opponent's eyes, he would have attacked before they even knew he was there. Stunned them, or something.

Tom watched him for a moment, before coming closer, letting his fingers slide and settle on the small of Harry's back.

"Come, sit down. I'll put the kettle on," he murmured. "I'm sure you've had a testing day dealing with Miss Skeeter's slander."

"I'm sorry about that," Harry said, looking up at him - sitting willingly, for once. He said nothing immediately to that, brewing some tea, before handing Harry a cup and taking his own seat.

"You feel like this is your fault?"

"Isn't it?" Harry scowled. "And your psychoanalysing me again. I told you to stop doing that."

"I also showed no intention of yielding to that demand, and will not do so now," he replied, calmly. "Why do you feel it is your fault and that you need to apologise to me?"

There was a private, darkly exquisite sort of thrill between slipping between the role of Harry's murderer and Harry's crutch and psychiatrist.

Harry's jaw clenched with frustration, and he drank in every detail, every flicker of emotion and shift of muscle and bone.

He thought using the surrogate would satiate these urges, the urge to reach out, map with fingers and mouth every twitch of that frantic, splintered mind, so linked to his own.

They just felt stronger than before.

An imposter, however well disguised, wasn't enough. He knew it wasn't real, that only Harry would do when it came as an end to this particular game.

"Well, you got dragged into the whole mess because of me," Harry muttered, "and it's making a scandal of me that Skeeter's interested in. No offence, but you were just there."

"I do have a reputation of my own, you know, which isn't solely linked to your own," he stated dryly. Harry flushed, fingers flexing, curling.

"Yeah, I know. I just - can't you just accept the bloody apology and move on?"

Tom's head tilted a little.
"Do you perhaps feel guilty that you survived Voldemort's attack, when your parents didn't?"

"I-what? - what's that got to do with anything?" Harry demanded, shoulders stiffening.

"Survivor's guilt," Tom returned. "Could be an explanation for your hero complex and martyrdom, as well as seeming need to take all responsibility for everything onto your own shoulders."

Harry blinked, and seemed to be trying to decide if that comment offending him or not.

He refrained from smiling.

"Drink your tea, Harry. What is it that you came here for?"

Harry didn't know when exactly Tom had even in the vaguest sense become a sounding board for him. He supposed because he was sick of feeling like a freak at work, and have people either treat him like breakable china or like he was Lord Voldemort incarnated.

Bloody wizarding world, always the same in a scandal.
It had been the same thing with the Chamber of the Secrets debacle.

Maybe he just wanted to feel normal, or, at least - well - normal with his psychiatrist had to be an oxymoron, didn't it?

If he was normal, he wouldn't even know Tom Riddle.

The old unease churned in his gut.

But Tom at least probably knew people who were more fucked-up than he was, so he had some leeway here.

"I narrowed down who the possible victim could have been," he stated, after a moment. "You know, in regards to if the copy-cat felt like he owed Voldemort something? The two people in my department, which it seems pretty likely that the copycat is linked to - would be the Bones' and the Crouch's, out of Voldemort's victims."

Tom gave a hum of acknowledgement, studying him.

"The thing is," he continued - and maybe he just came because he wanted someone to shoot his ideas at, to speak aloud, when his department was always busy and in uproar. It wasn't like Voldemort was the only psycho around, or the only issue they had to deal with.

Voldemort was merely the one he always got straddled with.

"The thing is," he repeated again, wetting his lips. "A lot of people didn't like Barty Crouch, at least as far as Dark Wizards went. He's locked up a lot of people, and accused others. It doesn't really limit the suspect pool down at all. The most obvious choice would be Crouch's son, but he died in Azkaban a good many years before Crouch was murdered."

"A dilemma indeed," Riddle murmured. "Have you checked if there have been any other Azkaban breakouts? Perhaps one which would tie with the copycat starting now, rather than later?"

"There isn't," Harry shook his head. "I already checked."

"Anyone with family in Azkaban due to to Crouch's actions?"

"Maybe I should just accuse all of pureblood wizarding society as murderers," Harry returned, dryly. A small smirk crept briefly across Tom's lips, before it was done.

Personally, he was still leaning towards drawing the killer out, because he was having shitty luck trying to find the copycat.

He was sure he would find him eventually, catch him eventually, what concerned him was how many people would have to die before then.

He rubbed his eyes tiredly, setting his teacup down, before pausing.

"Do you, uh, mind that I just come in and randomly talk to you about this stuff? I mean, it's not your job or anything, am I supposed to be paying you for this time-"

Tom chuckled a little at the last statement, and he scowled a little again, only for the other to reach out, fingers curling to brush and settle on the back of his neck.

"You can come to me whenever you want or need. No office hours. I'm happy to assist you in anyway I can."

For the first time, though Tom had touched him in passing before, Harry became aware of the concentrated warmth of Riddle's fingers on his cool skin, almost tingling, almost as if - no. He gave the other a grin, pulling his neck and shoulders free from the light grasp with a casual movement, as Tom pulled his hand back immediately.

"Thank you," he said. "It's much appreciated. I'll pay you back with coffee and my charming company or something."

Tom nodded.
"Note, our actual sessions are still very much in place, and you are still expected to attend,"
Great. More psychoanalysis and people trying to get into his head.

Harry glared stonily and huffed.

Once Harry was gone, Tom slipped back into the other room. Harry had asked him about it, if he could see, but he'd dismissed the query easily for another time.

It was no longer Harry, bloodied, pained and frantic, on his table.
His head tilted a little, as he took a step forward, leaning over the man, plucking the gag out easily

(the comments hadn't been Harry-ish enough, they'd been dull, crazed and unuseful), his interest much more peaked now.

"My my," he purred. "Has anyone ever told you that you look just like your father?"

Part One: 9

When Harry turned up for his meeting, the next afternoon, Tom wasn't there and the office space was instead in disarray.

He felt his shoulders stiffen as his eyes roved quickly around the room, mouth running dry as he took a step forward.

Papers slid and stuck under his feet as he moved carefully into the room, normally so immaculate, which now looked like a small tornado or hurricane could have swept through it and left the office in a better state.

The chair and table was upturned, the couch too with a large swipe slicing through one side of it and leaking stuffing like sofa-blood. He swallowed.

What the hell had happened here?
Whatever it was, it didn't look good.

His wand was already instinctively in his hands in seconds.

They'd found another body that morning - Dolores Umbridge, pink staining to red, eyes wide with shock and horror and mouth twisted in horror.

He'd known immediately it was the work of Voldemort, how could he not when the second he stepped into the crime scene he was assaulted with a rush of emotions and power so intense that it almost sent him to his knees.

Hatred this time, revulsion and disgust; a sense that she was inferior in every way, filthy, nothing more than a pig.

Instead of a butterfly, there was a toad crammed where her heart should have been, trapped in by the ribcage still intact.

Her tongue, too, had been removed, and the blood was everywhere.

Some of his team had theorized it was because this was more personal, an overkill, because she was someone Voldemort knew and despised personally, and whilst Harry could understand there maybe being an element of truth to that (not that it was difficult to despise the Under-Secretary to the Ministry) it wasn't solely for that reason.

Everything Voldemort did was an overkill, and everyone he killed had done something in the killer's mind to deserve their punishment - be it transformation with the butterflies, or condemnation and damnation as here.

Umbridge, he knew, from when she was at Hogwarts, was very orderly and neat. All of her pencils had been sharpened to the same length for crying out loud!

No, this was deliberately done, just like everything Voldemort did, simply because his victim would absolutely hate the mess he'd made of her.

It was so different to the normal ones they found that, if not for the emotions, he may have argued this was the copycat or some other copycat.

Voldemort had done absolutely nothing to honour this victim, and Harry had delved distractedly into old case files and crime scene photos all over again, which he'd actually been hoping to talk to Tom about.

Now it seemed Tom wasn't here, and that something very bad had happened instead.

The books, too, which lined the walls were strewn off the shelves.

His heart hammered in his chest, as he automatically started scooping up the papers with the absent sense that Riddle really didn't seem to like his room being messy - once, Harry had dropped his napkin by the edge of his plate around the man, once he was done with it, instead of in the bin, and the man had looked about to hiss at him! He shook his head, dismissing it as an irrelevant matter, trying to think, before freezing, setting the papers down again where they had been.

Crime scene.

This was potentially a crime scene. He shouldn't touch anything, contaminate anything. Stupid! He knew that.

Well, at least the Aurors were in.

He started carefully examining the scene.

The Previous Night

Tom leaned down over the half terrified, partially defiant and other part furious form of Barty Crouch Junior, though there was something else to the man's expression now.

The supposedly-dead-Crouch's chest heaved as he strained to free himself.

"Who the hell are you?" the man demanded, the second he could, and the gag was removed from his mouth.

"My my, such uncouth behaviour," Tom drawled. "First you insult my work, then you break into my house and now you address me in such a rude manner as if you didn't know my name already. Doctor T. M. Riddle, Psychiatrist, as it says on my door. Or did you accidentally break and enter in the wrong room because you didn't read the sound on the door?"

"Insult your work?" Crouch repeated. "I don't know what you're talking about. I've never done psychiatry in my life!"

Tom couldn't quite help the small, amused smile that crossed his lips, even if it remained icy and brittle around the edges.

"I meant my other work," he said, pityingly, before shaking his head. "I suppose it's lucky that I still have use for you, junior." He leaned in closer, as the man appeared about to respond, pressing his wand to his jugular. "Here's what's going to happen..."

It didn't take long him for him to figure out the story of what had happened, even without the strange aid of Voldemort's emotions.

It had been such a long time since he'd been at a scene like this, where he suspected a crime may have been committed, rather than staring down a splayed body with a sick, alien sense of satisfaction grinding through his body, but the pointers were more than self-evident to his conclusion.

There were clear signs of a duel, with the scattered papers, and what looked like a dark exploding hex against the bookcase, causing papers to go everywhere.

Images of what could have happened, visualisations, moved through his head.

Tom Riddle, from all he'd heard, was a talented wizard - the attacker would have to be powerful too, to have a chance of beating him, even with the element of surprise. His eyes narrowed a little.

The door to the other room was blown straight off the hinges, and it was tracking through there that gave him the biggest, most unnerving hints towards events.

It seemed the copycat had got there before him, though he was utterly bewildered as to why the man would target Tom.

Was it just because he'd been seen at his house? Because of Skeeter's argument insinuating a less than professional relationship between them?

He'd theorized that the copycat didn't make blind leaps of faith, so this couldn't be right. From everything he'd seen, the copycat was intently enthusiastic, indebted to Voldemort in some manner, violently unstable and yet clearly capable of careful planning if the situation required it.

A dark, twisted Pureblood heir, perhaps, raised on a diet of control and an intricate web.

Barty Crouch Junior, really, except the fucker was dead and none of this made any sense.

Most predominantly? The fact that another psychiatrists couch and table in the room was splattered with blood.

That was about the time he immediately called the forensics team to test it.
Then he just sat there staring at the wall. He'd never felt more terrified in his life.

"Oh god..." he heard someone say next to him. Someone in forensics.
Words were washing in and out of his ears again, and he swallowed down bile.

He felt Robards come up next to him, and a hand clamp down on his shoulder - too rough, firm and constricting in its efforts to help. He couldn't breathe.

"Potter, go home. Drink some tea."

"I want to work this case," Harry replied, a little numbly.

"There are pictures of you being tortured across the entire wall!" his fellow Auror hissed, rounding on him, eyes flashing. "You are already in fucking therapy, you are not on the field right now without your psychiatrist validating you, and your psychiatrist is currently missing and has his blood stained all across the floor of his office. "

Polyjuice potion. That was his theory. He swallowed. He wondered who his surrogate had been, and dreaded the thought it may be Tom.

Even if the man was by some miracle alive, he had the feeling he would have to find another psychiatrist.

Maybe one wouldn't even pick him up, considering all of the risks.

It was funny, he absolutely hated his sessions with Tom, hated the feeling of being prodded and analysed, of yet another person creeping into his head...and yet, now, as he was on the risk of losing that net and just being left alone with his mind and the pictures on the wall...he really didn't want to be.

"Please," he tried, stiffly. "I need to work this case, and you are not authorised to dismiss me. Scrimgeour is.."

"Scrimgeour isn't here, and, if he was, I'm sure he'd agree with me - ou understand perfectly well why I can't allow you being here. Weasley will take you home, don't do something stupid. We will keep you informed."

"I don't need someone to walk me home," Harry snapped, feeling on edge, and receiving a glare in return that made his fists clenched. "You seemed to find it fine that I worked on the copycat and anything to do with Voldemort before, regardless of any psychiatry taking place."

"Harry, please, be reasonable," Tonks said. "You know things have changed - look at the damn wall. You're becoming a target to this man."

"Well, he was a target for Voldemort as well," Ron pointed out.

"Thank you!" Harry exclaimed, tossing his hands in the air, and trying not to think why he was so insistent on this point. "So let's not waste time bickering when-"

"Yes," Robards snarled. "So go home. You know regulation, you can't be here, it is getting too personal. It can no longer be dismissed as interpretation or coincidence - this is not some dead man with a resemblance to you, this is over a dozen photos of you strapped down, cut open, and writhing in pain in more than once."

"Bit kinky actually," Dawlish mumbled. There was a complete silence, and they all turned to stare at him, the colour completely drained from Harry's face. The Auror seemed to realise what he'd said aloud, and held his hands up in surrender, flushing. "Sorry! I just - I meant -"

"I'm aware of the psychology," Harry said stiffly. "Stabbing as penetration, often used by impotent psychopaths like a form of sexual release. I took the bloody classes same as you."

And it was doing absolutely nothing for his mental state.
He'd never felt more disturbed in his life. Perhaps the only reprieve was that this was the presumably the copycat, and not Voldemort - because, frankly, being attacked and ravaged by the man's emotions about torturing him was a whole new level of messed up that he didn't want to approach.

"Go home," Robards repeated, more quietly this time. "You look white as sheet, and we need to work. I don't need to worry that you're going to puke on the evidence."

"I'm not going to puke on the evidence."

"Which is concerning in itself," Savage muttered. "How are you taking this so calmly?"
Did they think he was calm? He felt like the careful tape and stitches on his personality were dissolving in the insanity before him.

And Tom wasn't even here.
Bloody Psychiatrists. That was why it had been a bad idea to let anyone even remotely close. He had

the type of lifestyle where a mass murdering Dark Lord and his following was just dying to rip out any possible stabilizers he found in his life, just to see how far he could fall.

He hoped Tom was okay.

Maybe he was going to be sick after all.

"Guys...we just the blood samples back. It's not just Riddle's blood."

"Excuse me?" Harry turned, sharply. "Who's is it?"

There was a brief hesitation, a flicker of confusion.
"It's coming up as Barty Crouch, Jr, on our records."

Bloody hell.

Barty Crouch Junior was crouched near Number 12 Grimmauld Place, waiting quietly, discreetly, his heart hammering in his chest.

He didn't know how this had happened.

He saw Potter arrive on the street, and was behind him in seconds, only to receive wild-eyes and a wand in his face.

He smirked back, unconcerned.

"I think you'll be wanting to come with me, because I'm not telling the Ministry anything about Doctor Riddle's location locked up in a cell."

Part One: 10

Harry knew that this was stupid, that he was about to get himself killed, that handing over his wand to a copy cat serial killer was the type of stunt that would lead to his colleagues analysing his body in the morgue.

But the git was right. Harry wouldn't risk never finding Riddle, because this man seemed the type who'd faced the tortures of Azkaban and broken mad beneath the strain, and wouldn't crack and yield anything under Ministerial interrogation. Perhaps under Veritaserum, but who even knew what poor state Tom was in by the blood!

No, he may have had choices, but there was no real acceptable alternative here.

He was led blindfolded, hands tied, somewhere else, his heart lashing against his rib cage and a bad taste in his mouth.

He recognised the magic that coiled around him instantly, insidious, dark, familiar.

He just about stopped his breath from hitching.

"Voldemort..." the words were breathed out of his mouth before he could even think about it.
He took an instinctive step back, only to land on Crouch's foot. The copy cat and Voldemort in one room. "I really hope I'm not marking your first collaborative attempts."

He couldn't see the other, but he could feel him, and maybe that was even worse.
Even on a crime scene it didn't feel this intense. There was excitement, anticipation, a fondness, and most predominantly an edge of obsession at the steel of everything else - all reaching out for him, like a caress of fingers against his mind.

His throat bobbed.

Crouch's grip tightened, forcing him forward, down onto his knees.

There was no immediate response, but cold hands brushed against his face, firming, tilting his head up and baring his throat. Fingers, almost familiar, curved in, exploring and mapping the contours of his face, smoothing across his eyes, and he tried to bite when the pad of a thumb dragged against his lip.

The grip immediately tightened.
"Now now," Voldemort's voice was high and cold, the voice of his nightmares, hardly seeming real as it echoed in his eyes, "no need for that. I'm not going to hurt you, Harry."

"Where's Tom?" he demanded.

"That is not your concern right now."

"Actually it bloody well is. I certainly didn't come here for you," Harry snapped. He felt vulnerable, exposed, unable to see his enemies, and he didn't like it one bit.

What the hell was going on here?

"Rude," the other murmured, softly. "You should mind your manners, before someone else minds them for you."

"What do you want from me?" Harry demanded, after a moment, resisting the urge to swallow.

"Oh, numerous things," Voldemort said, almost dismissively.

"What do you want from me right now?" he clarified, jaw tight. Those fingers moved down, ghosting over his neck, and breath soon followed. Harry's shoulders went rigid.

"A choice," the killer murmured. "I simply want you to make a choice. When I untie you."

"And what's the choice?" Harry questioned, carefully. He would attack when he was untied, and not play along, Voldemort had to know that. He wasn't stupid, Harry could see that from his crimes. That thought did nothing to reassure him now.

"You can kill Crouch and walk free. Or you can walk free and I will find Mr Riddle and kill him instead."

For a second, Harry was convinced that the entire world had frozen and ground to a halt. Voldemort's hands settled on his shoulders, and he just felt utterly sick.

"I refuse."

"Then I will kill Mr Riddle and toss you back on the streets. Barty, today is your lucky day..."

Different hands grabbed him - Crouch's then - starting to haul him back up again, and Harry's heart raced, his mind writhing and twisting.

He'd never killed anyone before.

"Wait," he bit out.

He could practically feel the smugness radiating off Voldemort, and loathed it.

"Yes, Harry?"

"How do I know you'll keep your side of the bargain? How do you know I can kill him, even if I wanted to?"

"There are more ways than an Avada Kedavra to kill a man. I'll leave the methods to your discretion."

Why wasn't Crouch protesting to this? Of course, he knew Voldemort would want the copy cat dead, for tainting his work, degrading it, but...but he'd never expected this.

Bile clawed up his throat.

"We will make an oath on this matter," Voldemort purred.

He resisted the urge to swallow, more than aware that those eyes would be swallowing and devouring every twitch of movement which he made, and instead held a hand out blindly.

"Terms?"

Long fingers curled around his own, brushing rather unnecessarily along the flutter of pulse, dragging down. His mouth felt dry.

"You kill Barty Crouch before leaving this room, and I will let Mr Riddle go, unharmed by this ordeal, immediately upon the murder. You will not attack me, I will not attack you."

Harry wetted his lips, trying to think of any possible flaws in the words, a loophole - anything that would give him advantage or put him at a disadvantage. There was nothing.

Was Voldemort a politician when he wasn't playing Dark Lord?

"Deal," he murmured. The oath was struck. Harry had never felt more sick in his life, however much he was trying to justify all of this to himself. Crouch was a criminal, and if someone had to die here, surely he should make it so that the innocent lived?

His blindfold was taken away, and, for the first time, he got to see the Dark Lord.

Serpentine, scarlet-eyed, tall and thin. Harry very nearly reared back and recoiled immediately at the sight.

Not a man. He wasn't even a man. This was the work of seriously dark magic. A chill ran down his spine, and his blood was crushed ice in his veins.

He stayed rigidly still for a moment, just studying carefully.

Those scarlet eyes burned into his skin in turn, into his brain.

He had a feeling his nightmares just got worse.

"Why are you doing this?" he asked, quietly.

Voldemort's head tilted, and for a second, Harry was convinced he wouldn't answer. He had no reason to, really.

"Numerous reasons."

"Give me one," Harry challenged, jaw clenching.

He received a smile in response, the most terrifying one he'd ever seen in his life, lipless, and...Voldemort wasn't supposed to be physically deformed. He blended. So either his face in everyday life was a glamour, or this one was.

The appearance either way was telling.

"Because I think you'd look beautiful broken."

Harry stared for several long moments, heart hammering, the statement echoing deafeningly in his ears and splintering all of his other thoughts.

The man was insane.

He turned away, squeezing his eyes shut for a moment.
It was just words, not his inevitable sentence, but with the deal he'd just struck, a sense of helplessness crept into his blood nonetheless.

His fists clenched at his sides, and the cuffs on his hands were quickly removed too, his wand tossed back to him.

He wanted to attack more than anything, to obliterate the mind games, and this killer who insisted on stalking his shadow and twisting it to a new shape.

He could see now how easily how he'd been led to this moment, and the simplicity of it was unnerving. Voldemort had used even the copy cat against him, and was now fulfilling his own desires simultaneously in Crouch's death.

Convenient. How bloody convenient.

How could he do this? How the hell could he do this? He didn't want to kill anyone, and with the dark thoughts already brimming in his head, he was terrified of the consequences.

That was probably the point. The consequences. Just another little push until he was like a glass quivering before it shattered, ready for Voldemort's most gentle tap to push him over the edge and fragment beyond repair.

He didn't want to think about it, so he spun, pointed his wand, and cast.

Barty Crouch shattered instead.

Tom didn't think he'd ever seen a more exquisite thing in his life.

Of course, he'd been fascinated to see how Harry would choose to commit his murder, but, now that he had, he couldn't imagine it having been any other way.

Reducto. Straight through the chest.

Such a simple, easy way. It was a school-yard spell, and yet, even if Harry didn't seem to realise it or avoided the thought, extremely painful and ruthless in comparison to the Avada Kedavra curse, even if it didn't require the same direct murderous intention. He supposed Harry wasn't quite ready to confront his full potential for darkness. But he didn't mind. He enjoyed it better this way.

Harry's choice was also a repelling curse, like the auror was trying to shove the whole matter away from him as hard as possible, exploding.

His eyes gleamed with delight.

He'd love it when the boy was ready to do it properly, when he too took pleasure in the kill, in the finesse a wand or a scalpel could bring, in the way light faded from eyes and the rush of glorious power that followed with the knowledge that life and death was theirs to command.

They were gods.

But it was after the kill, the aftermath, with a vacant expression of a false idol on the floor, blood everywhere like a most fantastic Jackson Pollock, that the true satisfaction shifts in.

Their emotions blur together like wet water colours, his a hungry crimson, a tongue of flame, devouring the bruised purples and blues of sorrow and violence, the blooming burnt yellow of guilt like sickness, spreading, and the black as the tendrils of his influence draw the other ever closer.

It tastes like perfection on his tongue.

He can see Harry's face crumple, just a little bit, like he's sucked out some of the light in his eyes and claimed it for his own. There's a clench of steel jaw against him, a putting up of fists and shoulders squared in defense and he could wrench the barricades aside so effortlessly right now and spread the boy bare before him in his quivering, fragile mental state.

He doesn't.

Some kills are quick, some meals a hasty dash because something needs to be consumed for consumptions mistakes. But Harry is a delicacy, something to be savoured and relished.

He'll pick him apart slowly, teasing every last drop of emotion and defence, every inch of goodness and morality that covers Harry like he was a pair of shoes that had been meticulously shined all over for the first day of school.

It was funny. Harry's outside was more chaotic than that of Tom Riddle's immaculate dress, but where his own heart and mind were carefully ordered for the finest of destruction, for art, Harry's was a chaotic fingerpainting of life and personality.

Harry was an essentially good person, a moral golden boy and guiding beacon for all things light in the world.

He'd never wanted to ruin anything more than his life.

He stepped forward, once, some more, when Harry still stood frozen, throat bobbing, eyes fixed on the his first intentional kill.

"Just as well Mr Riddle's still alive," he purred, against the boy's ear. "You look rather like you need a psychiatrist to stitch up the cracks again."

Harry stepped back, turned to face him.
"Your part of the deal. Fulfill it. Now." The voice was cold, stiff. Eyes? Devastatingly vulnerable.

He smoothed out a finger to lift the other's chin, relishing the momentary collapse for his need for persona.

"So you don't want to pick out a butterfly?"

He laughed as he was shoved away, violently, eyes flashing and flaring with fury.
He grinned back, with no pretense of soft lips to hide sharp teeth bared in his glee.

He levitated Crouch easily, heading for the door, glancing back when he was outside of the wards.

"Tom will be in his home. I put him there about the same time Barty picked you up. Run along now."

He disapparated.

Part One: 11

Chapter Summary

Bold = Parseltongue by the way :)

It took Harry a while to track down where Tom lived, as the other's personal life was never the topic for their sessions and conversations.

Nonetheless, he hurried there with all haste, disregarding official regulations to do so. He should have gone straight to the office, reported everything that had happened, but...

But...

Well, what the hell did he say? He could obviously tell the truth, but there was something rather uncomfortable about the truth, and his head was spinning, and he had to see if Tom was okay. That Voldemort had kept his side of the deal - that he hadn't just killed Crouch for nothing.

There was no answer when he rang the doorbell, so he kicked the door down, only to set the man's wards screaming.

Moments later, Tom appeared by the stairs, wand in hand. He looked bleary-eyed and battered. Harry nearly melted with relief, and for a few seconds he just stared, dishevelled, before realising he was pretty much practically breaking into his psychiatrist's house. Albeit with good reason.

"What the hell happened?" he didn't recognize his own voice.
Tom flicked his wand to set the wards to rights, coming down the rest of the way down the stairs.

"...what happened to you?" the man returned, studying him carefully. "I'm going to assume it's related to the rather alarming gap that's suddenly in my memory. Last thing I remember is getting attacked in my office, I just woke up here when someone destroyed my wards..."

Harry swallowed, rubbing a hand over his blood-shot eyes.

"You look terrible," Riddle remarked. Harry snorted, hysteria bubbling in his chest. Tom didn't remember anything. He didn't even have a lead. What if Voldemort did this again? Or with somebody else?

His legs suddenly felt like they were going to give out, and Tom was next to him in seconds as his knees buckled, grabbing him around the waist.

"Easy," the Slytherin murmured. "Okay. Let's go sit down. Fill me in on what I missed."

Tom's voice was so calm it soothed, like water over a burn, and he swallowed thickly, allowing the other to guide him through to the living room.

He'd never seen Tom's home before, but it was just as immaculate as his office. The floor was a polished wood, with a soft rug and a sofa which managed to look both elegant and remain

comfortable. He sank into it, blindly, eyes darting around the room.

Bookcases again, everything tidy, with a large painting on the wall.

The entire side of the living room was a glass door, leading to a patio and a garden.

"You have a beautiful home," Harry murmured, distractedly. Tom crouched in front of him, fingers smoothing over his hands, and it was only when Tom stilled him that he realised they had been violently trembling at all.

He sucked in a deep, sharp breath.

"You haven't been back to your office?" he asked.

"I just woke up," Tom repeated, eyes fixed on him. Harry wetted his lips, one hand jerking in Riddle's grip. His psychiatrist let it go, watching him run a shaking hand through his hair instead. "What happened?" the other asked, again.

"The Copy Cat - Barty Crouch Junior - he broke into your office. Attacked you."

"We duelled," Tom murmured. "I remember this part."

"Do you remember what happened other than that?" Harry asked, bile in his throat. Tom gave a small shake of his head.

"Nothing."

Harry swallowed. Wondered if he should even say anything at all. But Riddle would find out anyway, wouldn't he? It was a bit of a difficult scene to keep a secret.

"We have...reason to believe that he polyjuiced you and tortured you. There are pictures."

"Polyjuiced me," Tom repeated, eyes narrowing just slightly. Harry could almost see the cogs in his mind working. "Into you."

"Interesting deduction."

"But a correct one, seeing how your shoulders have stiffened," Tom murmured. "Must have been traumatic for you."

"You're seriously talking about me now? You're the one who was horribly attacked and-" and it was his fault. Tom's hands squeezed tightly, forcing his attention again.

"Talk me through what happened," his psychiatrist instructed. "What was the point in attacking me?" the other paused. "...how am I still here? Why wouldn't Voldemort just kill you? What happened?"

Harry's throat bobbed, and he stared down at his knees. Tom's eyes narrowed, barely noticeably.

"What was the deal?" Riddle pressed, "my life for-?"

"It's sorted now," Harry said, softly, eyes distant. "It doesn't matter."

"Yes it does. Harry, please tell me. As your psychiatrist and your...friend. I am worried for you. Voldemort seeks to alienate you, and you need someone on your side to fight him. Somebody you can trust."

"And you're willing to still be on my side after all...this?" He didn't understand. Why? Why would Riddle still bother him when he could make the same money with much less risk with another patient.

Tom gave him a small smile.
"Evidently so."

"...you don't owe me anything," Harry said, bluntly after a moment. "With all of this and the...deal I negotiated. It was my fault you were dragged into the whole mess in the first place."

"I am not doing this out of obligation," Tom returned, still studying him closely. "Nor for money. Believe it or not, I do just enjoy your company and find you interesting. Besides, I don't much like being used, and I don't like people who attempt to exploit me for their own purposes either."

Harry snorted at that, before shaking his head.
The images flashed and writhed behind his eyes, and bile clawed up his throat.

He'd done the right thing, hadn't he? Voldemort would have killed Tom if he didn't do it!
It still felt so wrong, and there was no one he could talk to about it - he - he couldn't put this on Tom, the responsibility. And he didn't know what to do.

They wouldn't put him in Azkaban for this, surely?
People were already wary that he could sink into Voldemort's, a killer's, perception. How would they take this? They would understand, wouldn't they?

"Harry," Tom pressed once again, nudging his chin up. "You can tell me anything. That's what I'm here for. You can't do this on your own."

Couldn't he? God, even his psychiatrist thought he was breaking.

"Pretty sure you're supposed to encourage independence," Harry muttered.

"Harry, Voldemort wants to destroy you, pick you apart piece by piece. Talk to me, let me help you piece yourself together. **You can trust me.**"

The words seem to come from underwater, and his head was spinning, his gut churning, and he was hyper-aware of Tom's hands still enveloping his own, and of scarlet eyes burned onto his eyeballs, and blood - everywhere blood - and -

Would Voldemort make a crime scene with this?
Would he take credit?

"Harry, breathe," Tom ordered, calmly, hands moving up, cupping his cheeks. "Breathe for me. Now. There we go, just calm down. Come on, I'll make you a drink - you look like you could do with one."

Harry numbly let Riddle guide him towards the kitchen, just as gleaming and polished - obviously very state of the art, which he could have guessed by how much the man seemed to like cooking.

He felt like he could hurl straight onto the countertop, as Tom pushed him to sit at the little island. He stared at the table, trying to focus - half stood up.

"I need to go and talk to the rest of my team, now that I know you're alright," he murmured. Tom caught his shoulder, firmly, pushing him back down again.

"Just sit down," the other instructed. "There'll still be there later for your report. You are my patient, and my priority right now."

"How can you be so calm when you know what happened?" Harry's voice was hoarse, and he clutched the warm cup of tea shoved into his hands like a lifeline. "I mean - you can guess, and then you don't know and-"

"Drink."

The words cut through his rambling - and god, he was being pathetic! He was trained to deal with situations like this. But not like this. The training didn't compare. Not when he still had Voldemort's emotions streaming along in a whisper with his own. At least, he hoped it was Voldemort's emotions, he didn't know.

He drank. Immediately felt calmer himself, and looked down.

"Have you...put something in this?" he asked.

"Herbs. Medicinal use. Calms you down."

"You put weed in my tea?" Harry blinked. "That can't be ethical."

"I didn't say I weed, I said herbs, of the medicinal type. I came across it in my travels. Old recipes. Would you like to get you some less herbal tea? I also have Earl Grey?"

Harry stared down at the tea, took another sip. Felt the churning in his gut settle marginally. "...no, this is good."

Tom nodded, kept a light hand on his shoulder, sat down next to him this time, slowly letting the hand drop as if checking that he was steady first.

"What happened, Harry?" Riddle asked, in that soft, calm 'trust me' voice which simultaneously soothed him and terrified him because he knew the man was just another person trying to get in his head.

Maybe he was there already.

Harry felt jumbled, drained by everything that happened, splintered around the edges, maybe even shattered entirely.

Like Crouch. Crouch with a reducto point blank in his chest.

The next second he'd shoved Tom aside, scrambling off the chair.

"Bathroom! Where's your bathroom I'm going to be sick."

Things blurred a bit after that. He knew he should be at the Ministry, in the Office, sorting this out, telling them Tom wasn't currently kidnapped.

Instead, he was pale faced and shaking, shuddering as he relieved himself of everything in his stomach, white-knuckled. He felt like an old dish cloth that had been wringed out in a knot.

He was vaguely aware that Tom was kneeling next to him - and really, in another situation he would have found it hilarious that the psychiatrist was tainting his immaculate clothing by kneeling on the

cold bathroom floor - fingers skating a warm pattern on his back.

He didn't know if this was professional anymore, but his mouth tasted acrid and he swallowed some water given to him blindly too.

"He's dead. I killed him."

"Voldemort?" Tom murmured, a low rumble near his ear. Harry shook his head, jerkily. "Crouch," Tom said, after a moment, and he nodded.

Sometimes, he was thankful that Doctor Riddle was so adequate at slotting together the pieces, because he knew he didn't have to explain the rest of the deal for the other to get the gist of what had happened.

He was hauled up, hands clutching his waist tightly, leading him to the sofa again.
Blue lounge. Soothing. Like Tom's office. Ruined office. Ruined body. Destroyed. Couldn't even make a butterfly out of it, not really.

It was just as well he had nothing to left to throw up.

"Shh," Tom hushed him. "It's alright."

"It's not alright. I just killed a man."

"Well, he wasn't a very good man," Tom returned.

"Or a good copy cat," Harry snorted, laughing, a little hysterically. He was wrapped in something warm, a blanket, and once again half stood before being gently pushed down again.

"Just stay still. You're in shock, I think," Tom murmured. "You're okay here. You're safe. I'll look after you."

"I need to talk to the Aurors," Harry muttered.

"And you will. But not now," Tom said, softly. "I have sent them all the relevant details whilst you were a bit...fuzzy. They know it's sorted now."

Harry's throat bobbed again, and he nodded, breathing carefully, rubbing his eyes again, nodding again. Tom had sorted it. He wanted more tea.

He'd been calm, facing Voldemort, and calm in the face of his murder, able to do what he had to do to get everyone out of that situation.

But the pressure was gone now, and there was just...nothing to keep him together right now. Nothing to do. Maybe he should go and see the Aurors anyway, if it would give him something to focus on.

But he was also absolutely terrified that he might get called to another crime scene when he arrived. Voldemort's. His. Theirs.

"Tell me what happened. What you're thinking," Tom murmured. "It will make you feel better."

Harry's eyes squeezed shut, colour popping behind the lids. How could he talk about something when it wasn't even sorted in his own head?

"The throwing up didn't clue you in?" he returned, as much in his normal voice as he could manage. He shook his head. "I can't talk about - I - I can't think, I just-my god-"

"Come here," Tom instructed, crooking a finger at him in a gesture to shuffle closer on the sofa. Harry wetted his lips, hesitated, edged a little closer suspiciously.

Tom didn't tug him, one hand still calmly outstretched. Maybe it was that calm that drew him in - that point of solace and quiet when everything in his own head was raging.

Riddle was always so calm, composed. There was probably something wrong with the fact that his psychiatrist was drawing him closer like this, wrapping an arm around his blanketed form, letting him rest his head on his chest, fingers stroking through his hair.

Harry flushed a little, despite himself, clearing his throat.
"Is this a professional technique?"

"It's not a conventional one, no. But I do believe it's helping, and that is all that matters to me. Now, focus on me, on my hands or whatever else, on the fact that you are secure, go back to the office if you will, or your home, a field, the Quidditch Pitch - anywhere that you feel happy and calm. Shut your eyes if it helps."

Harry tried shutting his eyes, then promptly opened them again because he didn't like what he saw there, in the darkness of his own head.

So he focused on the gentle fingers stroking through his hair. He wasn't...comfortable, he felt awkward and his insides were itching and lurching, but there was something reassuring in the repetitive, soft movements. He swallowed again. Clenched his fists so they wouldn't shake.

He slowly felt himself moving back off the edge of his sanity, or at least so he wasn't hanging by his fingers.

"Now, talk to me," Tom said quietly, again. "How did you feel killing Crouch? - no, focus on the good place..."

Harry glanced up at that, settled again, thought of the fingers to be like the wind tearing through his hair as he was on the Quidditch pitch, soaring free in the air, untouched, chasing after the snitch,

Usually, he'd scorn such practices as stupid therapy exercises that helped nothing. Right now, he'd do and try anything to go back, to just feel...normal again, less unsettled.

"I wasn't thinking at the time. I couldn't. I just...did what I had to do. It didn't even...I couldn't tell what was me and what was...him," he murmured. "I felt...sad, guilty. And..." he hesitated. Tom said nothing, just waiting. "Powerful. Is that wrong? Oh my god, that's wrong, that's sick-"

"Just let go of right and wrong for now," Tom murmured. "They don't matter. You feel what you feel, and you don't need to justify it."

"But it's wrong. It makes me just as bad as him, I-"

"-it is understandable," Tom interrupted, not faltering in his movements. "Of course you would feel powerful, and the power would make you feel good. You were in an incredibly stressful, frightening environment, you probably felt very vulnerable. The power would combat that sense of helplessness and fear. Of course you would feel good. It is natural."

Harry swallowed.

"So it's...it's okay? It doesn't make me - it doesn't make me like him? I mean, the butterflies, that's what he's trying to do. Change me. Make me like him. And if I enjoyed killing, then...does that make me like him regardless?"

"You have a very unique bond with Lord Voldemort, and the ability to completely perceive his point of view. Being able to understand someone who scares you, or disturbs you, does not make you a bad person. Why is good and bad so important to you?"

Snitch getting closer. Gryffindor gets a goal. Cheering in the crowds.

"Because if I can see his point of view, I need something to separate myself. It-it feels like I've done it, when he does it, and now I have...I...it's...it's..." Tom was offering no suggestion to help him finish the sentence, and he wetted his lips, staring at the floor. "It's something to hold onto. I need to be good, because then I'm not him. Now that I've...it was for good reasons. I saved you, that makes me different from him!"

Except, Voldemort thought he was making people into art, redeeming the worst qualities of their living personalities. He didn't view himself as a villain.

The fingers kept moving in his hair, a chest softly rising and falling. Tom still didn't say anything. He needed a rope, something handed to him to cling onto. Something of his own.

"What I did was right, wasn't it?"

"As your psychiatrist it is not my place to pass judgment on your actions."

"But as my friend? Tom- just-I need-"

"As your friend, I would have done the same thing," Tom stated.

Harry sagged a little bit, some tension leaving him, insides still rolling.

"I'm glad you're okay."
Even to his psychiatrist, even now, there were things he couldn't say, but...when he'd seen that office, torn to shreds and bloodied...

"Get some rest. We can talk more later. I'll make you up a bed in the guest room."

Harry's head snapped up at that, and he sat up.

"No, no it's fine. I can't, I need to get to the office, and I couldn't possibly impose on you in-"

"Overnight observation," Tom said. "It would put my mind at ease. Unless you think it would be beneficial for you to be alone tonight?"

He could go to Ron's, Hermione's...

Possibly face explaining. When did he stop talking to his best friend's about this?

His mind felt scrambled, Tom stared back at him, earnestly, waiting.
Tom had almost died because of him. Tom helped. Harry bit the inside of his lip, giving a noncommittal shrug.

"...he knows where I live," Harry muttered, after a moment. It wasn't quite an agreement, but...Tom gave him a small nod, in response.

"Come on then. It's late. Help yourself to breakfast before you head out in the morning if I'm not around or awake."

Part One: 12

Tom led Harry gently through the rooms of his house, to the spare bedroom next to the masters. He pointed out the large bathroom as he did so, setting aside a fresh, fluffy towel for Harry's use if he wanted to take a shower.

A deep satisfaction thrummed in his veins.

As far as he was concerned, this entire stunt had gone perfectly. It was like finally watching a masterpiece he'd spent years crafting being unveiled to the world for the first time, teased delicate threads being plucked like an exquisite orchestra just for him.

Harry broke so beautifully that he wanted to cry - almost, certainly thank him.

His patient clung to him with an unconscious desperate need. Fine crystal to be the handled with the utmost care and devotion - or, perhaps, diamond. Harry was very strong, like him, and only a diamond could cut another diamond.

Either way, he wanted to devour and cherish every inch of Harry's agony, lap up the terrified confusion and see how many times he could smooth and soothe the fractures before the boy broke beyond all repair.

That had been covered before, but his blood still sang with the desire for it.

Hearing Harry talk about him unknowingly, express openly the guarded secrets of his heart to the very man he should most protect them from, was delicious.

Not that his patient wasn't to some extent in safe hands.

He would never allow anyone else to hurt Harry, he would prize him and even love him, in his own way. A way that could often blur between such affections and hate, fuelled by possession and control.

But that didn't make him want to shred and peel away the gold exterior any less. Harry was so...so contained that he just wanted to rip it all out.

If it wouldn't kill him in such an unsatisfactory manner, Tom would have torn Harry's heart out of his chest, to see those green eyes widen and darken with pain, as life and emotions metaphorically still pumped weakly against his fingers.

More than anything; to claim every part of the other until no one had any doubt about the matter.

"Are you sure it's alright I stay here?" Harry asked, glancing at him. He offered a reassuring smile in response, as they entered the bedroom.

"I already said it's fine," Tom reminded, indulgently - he did so loathe repeating himself. He let his throat bob, as Harry still looked uncertain. "Truthfully," he lied, "as much as I feel a professional obligation to observe you and make sure you're alright, on an unprofessional level I'm grateful for the company tonight. After...everything. Especially the company of a noted Auror such as yourself."

The last part was added with a hint of teasing in his tone.

Harry visibly seemed to bolster and square his shoulders, chin lifting for the mutual purpose, in defiance of being a burden - for being needed.

It was adorable, and even familiar, in a way; though he imagined they liked the sensation for different reasons. He loved the power being needed gave him, Harry craved the confirmation that he was necessary and important to at least someone.

Childhood trauma right there, complete with the pretty bow.

"Well, if it makes you feel better," Harry allowed, attempting a smirk.

"It would," he smiled back once more, before turning serious for a moment as Harry scanned his gaze across the room. Unlike his own bedroom done up in shades of dark green and blue, with wood, this room was cream with one deep crimson wall by the headboard of the bed. "Thank you for making a deal for me."

Harry swallowed, staring at the floor.

"Yeah, well, you know too much about me to be left in Voldemort's company," he tried.

Tom suppressed a grin, keeping his expression sincere, glad Harry wasn't actually looking at him - too uncomfortable with the subject.

"What do you think he would do with the information?"

"Manipulate me to his own design," Harry murmured, immediately, before blinking, fingers flexing, jaw clenching. It was just wonderful.

"Your secrets are safe with me, don't worry. Do you want to borrow some clothes and a toothbrush?"

When Harry awoke the next morning, twisted in the duvet, he immediately wished he hadn't.

Everything flooded back with a startling clarity that denied the peace of hazed memories and forgetfulness on the matter, and he lay in cold sweat among the unfamiliar sheets.

The crimson wall dripped like blood above him.

It had been an uneasy night's sleep, filled with Crouch's death, and scarlet eyes, and the sense of suffocating as indistinct shadows circled him and caressed his skin. The touches burned cold, as painful as the soft fingers were pleasing. Fingers. Shadows. He meant shadows.

God, wasn't his head messed up enough already?

He sat up, finding a glass of water had been placed on the bedside table for him.
Tom. He let a weak smile cross his lips, as much as he was mortified that the other had obviously come in whilst he was asleep and no doubt tossing and turning.

He sat up, rubbing his eyes, swinging himself out of bed and peeling his shirt off his body.
Yesterday's events left an acrid taste in his mouth, and nothing quite felt the same anymore - as if the world had been tilted a little, or coloured in a shade just off from normal.

He'd killed someone.

The next second he was stumbling towards the bathroom again, white knuckling the toilet seat, no strength in his knees and nothing left in his stomach to vomit.

He had to get to the Auror office and get his statement. It was just as well he had no desire for breakfast. He straightened, drinking some more water to get the taste of dry heaving out of his mouth.

He straightened to find Riddle leaning against the bathroom door, and almost jumped out of his skin.

"Bloody hell, don't do that!" he snarled. Tom blinked back at him in response, raising his brows, and Harry flushed, gritting his teeth. "Thank you for letting me borrow your spare room. I'll have your shirt returned to you." He plucked at the soft no doubt obscenely expensive material still balled in his hands, trying not to shiver in the cool bathroom.

He was suddenly hyper-aware of the facts that he was standing with gooseflesh in his boxer shorts and nothing else in his Psychiatrist's bathroom, whilst Tom stood in a full three piece suit next to him.

He felt horrendously underdressed, and cleared his throat.

"No rush," Tom murmured, eyes moving over his form, with an almost inspecting manner. Harry folded his arms across his chest.

"I'll get going to the Auror office. I'm sure you're busy with patients-clients, or whatever it is that you do all day," he muttered.

"You're going to give your statement about what happened yesterday?"
Something in Tom's tone made him pause.

"...you don't think I should?" Harry's brow furrowed.

"It's not my place to comment," Tom replied lightly. Harry scowled.

"I'm asking."

"I'm not saying you shouldn't give a statement. I understand that you have to."

"But?" Harry pressed, as Tom wetted his lips.

"But I cannot help wondering if including all the details is wise."
Harry stared at him.

"You're suggesting I lie. That's a criminal offence Doctor Riddle."
Tom stared back at him, unflinching.

"I am suggesting you omit your involvement in the murder of Barty Crouch Jr. Even if you get away with the kill due to your position and the details of the case, including but not limited to Crouch being Voldemort's copycat, do you not think that the admittance of guilt might do more harm than good? If people are already questioning your similarity to Lord Voldemort. If I were you I would think carefully before telling everyone I was another step down the path of violence that he has marked out for you."

"So I should say Voldemort killed Crouch?" Harry's mouth felt dry. It made a horrible amount of sense. People were going to mistrust him, despite his best intentions. Murder was murder, and not even an Auror could be fully exempt from the reach of the law.

They would turn against him for sure.

He could feel the doubts and the paranoia creeping in, the lump of hated hopelessness in his throat and he loathed the kind and careful compassion on Tom's face.
After a moment, he shook his head decisively, drawing in a breath.

"No. The people who really matter will understand," he stated. He had to believe that. He just had to. "Thanks for the concern, really, but I'll be okay. Besides, I don't think I can really afford to have shared secrets with a serial killer. Voldemort would only use it against me, or reveal my deceit at the most inconvenient time possible - the initial lie would really make everyone doubt me."

Tom was silent for several long seconds.

"You really do seem to understand him remarkably well," the Psychiatrist said. "Presuming your assumptions are correct."

Harry shrugged.
"He's a manipulative bastard, and I already know that dark secrets have a way of coming back to bite."

"Doubt either way then," Tom stated. "Good luck."

"Cheers," Harry snorted, edging out the bathroom. "And thanks again."

"It was no trouble. I will see you later, yes?"

"Yeah, I suppose."

"Good."

The crime scene was there that evening.

Harry had been anticipating it, but he still dreaded the call when it came in.
He'd tried resisting, saying that he didn't want to see, that he didn't want to be on this case anymore, that he just...couldn't.

They hadn't listened; had pleaded and entreated and reminded him that they needed him to catch Voldemort, that he was the only one who could, or didn't he want to catch the man? That the whole point of the Psychiatrist was so that he could continue doing the job.

So here he was, standing in the room, cleaning his glasses and staring at his feet so he could avoid looking for even just a moment longer. There was a twisted, churned up feeling in his stomach, and the stench of blood in his nose.

Not looking didn't stop him from being buffeted by the emotions though - absolute glee, admiration either, something coy and offering, a sharp crystallized form of obsession that caressed him just like the shadows in his dream. His nightmare.

His throat bobbed and he looked up.

It was different from the other set ups - of course it was - it was Crouch, and there was no butterfly posture and spread of limbs anymore, which just terrifyingly reminded him that he was dealing with a

highly intelligent sociopath who was only killing in a pattern to show off his work and allow them to track him, to make a message.

There was no compulsion to kill like that, though he did suspect that Voldemort would have a thing about about always making his kills elegant or artistic, but other than that he might never kill in the same way if he didn't want to. There was no time pattern to measure either.

The scene in front of him made bile claw up his throat.
Crouch had been blown apart with his Reducto spell, but now, all the guts and the organs had been placed in bowls and plates on the table, delicately arranged in a buffet and cooked, the blood in glasses parading as wine. Butterflies, of course.

Harry took an unwilling step forward, the candles on the table flickering on his face.

"Potter," Scrimgeour rumbled, in an indication that he should start talking about his observations.

Harry's fists clenched tightly at his sides.

"Our first date," he bit out. "A meal is traditional, is it not? This is...he means it as a gift, a showcasing of..." he squeezed his eyes shut, "a showcasing of my work. He's proud of it. He also no doubt wants to remind you of what I've done."

He reluctantly opened his eyes again, moving around to see different angles.

"Of course," he continued, "the body isn't like it would be to his design, and he compensates for that with his arrangements because even now he cannot completely give up control."

Blood and violence washed behind his eyelids.

"It's not complete, but he has meticulously put the pieces of the heart on his own plate. He owns that. Devours that. It is his."

"Does he mean Crouch's heart for copying him, or yours?" Robards questioned.

Harry's stomach lurched.
"Both. It's not implausible that he can read my emotions just like I can read his. In that sense, I would imagine he feels a sense of ownership. I don't know." His head was spinning, and he rubbed his temples.

Ron and Tonks both watched him with concern.
"Boss," Tonks began. "Maybe we should continue this conversation else-"

"No," Scrimgeour said, his eyes still fixed upon him. Harry circled the table again.

"My plate has...I think it's brain matter. Of course. Head and heart. Either I'm getting in his head, or he's getting into mine and...scrambling it, much like Crouch's was scrambled with the Reducto. I'm...I'm consuming his thoughts, his ideologies and motivations. Trying to think like him for this case and so in some way becoming him when I analyse him. The Butterfly at the centre consolidates that...it's a...a Viceroy Butterfly. It copies the poisonous Monarch butterfly."

There was a terse silence.

"You copying Voldemort, becoming him," Scrimgeour supplied.

"In his eyes," Harry murmured.

"The Viceroy copies the Monarch to gain protection from the predators they share though, doesn't it?" Savage mused. "Who are you trying to gain protection from by copying him in his eyes?"

Harry smiled, without mirth.
"I'm protecting myself and the people around me from him. Mr Riddle could tell you that, I'm sure. Mimic him, identify with him, and he won't kill me. Step out of the boundaries of what he would like for me, shatter the illusionary relationship he thinks he has with me...the protection is broken. He..." he'd said he thought Harry would look beautiful broken.

He didn't know. Everything was confused. Time to move on.

"The blood in the glass represents wine. I could go biblical on that...blood of Christ...last supper connotations...but I think he means the meal more in the sense of a first date, whether that's a mockery or sincere I don't know. It's blurred. As much as the whole scene is rife with symbolism, it's also a taunt. He knows perfectly well I'd hate this...this gift. He's not simple. His motivations and actions are layered. He can love whilst he hates something, he destroys to create, he revels in paradox."

But the blood of Christ was supposed to save...what was this, supposed to ruin? Or did Voldemort believe he was in some way saving him?

He didn't know. It was difficult to be objective when his own guilt and emotions tangled among Voldemort's, and he was suddenly shocked to realize how difficult for him to distinguish still now what was him and what wasn't his.

That really wasn't good.

He turned abruptly away from the scene.

"I'm done. That's all I know."

He could feel their eyes on him as he strode away from the table.

Part One: 13

Harry didn't think he'd had a proper nights sleep in weeks.

The dreams continued, disorientated and splintered. It was like running his mind along lines of twisting black silk, that enveloped him and smothered him, so light that he could ignore it outside of the fact he couldn't breathe.

It glided across his skin, sensuous and disturbing for the hands that controlled it, never visible for long. He shivered beneath it, woke up in his sheets drenched in cold sweat, bewildered and terrified at the same time and not quite able to put his finger on what was making him so uneasy.

He was sure a dream analyser would have a field day. He was sure Tom would too. But he hadn't mentioned them.

Though he felt closer to Tom after the whole Voldemort debacle, something having cemented with his actions and Riddle's easy acceptance and ability to be there, exactly as he needed - there were some things that still felt too intimate to be discussed.

His mouth felt dry, as he sat up night after night, rubbing the haze away from his eyes, vision smeared like scarlet on alabaster skin. Too pale.

There were butterflies too. Always the butterflies amongst the silk, he couldn't always see them, but he could feel them, fluttering against his skin, into his mouth if he screamed.

One night, the silk had been a cocoon, stringing him up, trapped until he was ready to...well, be a butterfly he supposed. And all the times, the shadows moved around him.

Actually, scratch the dream analyser. It wasn't that subtle, and he didn't need a degree to be able to tell quite clearly the distorted impressions which had invaded his mind. He knew who had crawled in there.

And he didn't like it.

Ron and Hermione were worried about him too, he knew. He'd met up with them both recently, outside of work for the first time in too long. It had been good. He hadn't quite realized how much he had missed them.

But he couldn't talk to them, however much Hermione tried to gently coax him to do so.

He just...he knew they wouldn't understand, couldn't understand. Their minds were entirely their own, and if they made some stupid plans, they could be confident that it wasn't somebody else's seed. They could be confident who they were.

Harry would have given anything for that luxury.

Voldemort had gone quiet for a bit, though Harry wasn't willing to bet that meant anything good for anyone. He continued having sessions with Tom, and the months slipped closer to a grey Christmas.

There was also the Ministry's Winter Ball coming up now, which he was absolutely dreading. Hermione said it would be fun, a chance to forget about things for a bit. Ron said at least they had free wine and snacks.

All Harry could think of was all the people who were going to stare at him, and ask him all sorts of questions which they seemed to think were okay just because they were curious and he was Harry Potter.

And the entire time, he couldn't help but wonder if he would be invited for a 'second date'.

The whole thing was bloody exhausting.

He was still trying to catch Voldemort, to pin down who he could be from what little he'd carefully scraped together over the years.

It all came down to that Halloween Night.
For a reason, unbeknownst to him or anyone else as far as he was aware of, a serial killer had targeted his parents and killed them. He himself had been left with the lightning bolt scar, which was now somehow the cause of their connection.

He was a psychiatrist's dream date ever since - the talk of such circles, as the vultures circled and bickered over who got to pick at his brain and work out what it was that clicked with his would be executioner, and whether that had been caused by Halloween, or was the cause of Halloween and the reason he was still alive.

It was more than evident that Voldemort was unpredictable though. His kills leapt around, with varying motives, and sometimes just for fun or to make a point. It was all different brush strokes and colours by the same artist, on a collage of different canvasses.

Harry dreaded finding out what the final product was.
Recently, however, he couldn't help but have other suspicions too.

It was unnerving, but he suspected Voldemort might be someone close to him. For years, he'd played it as just being the link between them, but...he knew an alarming amount, and the most alarming thing was that for years now he seemed to have been waiting for something. Harry just didn't know what it was.

If this was all just about converting him, surely it would have been easier just to kidnap him early and raise him wrong?

No, this was a game. He just wasn't entirely sure what they were playing for.

Well, someone close to him, or someone with connection to the Aurors, because Voldemort's crimes had stepped up a hell of a lot after a thirteen year absence, and increased again when he joined the Aurors.

Thirteen years - nothing.
Then the killings started, again, with a very clear tag and he'd felt those emotions for the first time. They'd overwhelmed him completely.

He'd spent the last of his Hogwarts years learning how to manage the influx, then he'd joined the Aurors to catch the bastard, and it had stepped up again.

The butterflies started.
It was stupid to say that the murders tracked the progression of his 'relationship' with Voldemort, but he found it to be true.

Whilst the man had always been fixated on him to some extent, it was with the butterflies that he became obsessed. Maybe because Harry was old enough to play with such things.

He didn't know.

He was startled out of his thoughts by a light touch to his shoulder.

"Hello Harry, may I call you Harry?"
For a second, Harry just stared, confused as to why Rita Skeeter was there, right in front of him. She clutched her acid green handbag tightly, quill floating next to her, with a sharp white smile that reminded him of some horrible creature more than anything else. "May I sit down?"

"No."

She sat down anyway, and his jaw clenched. The quill was already scribbling away.

This was why Hermione was bloody campaigning for libel laws in the wizarding world.

"So, Harry. Did you read my latest article?" she smiled.

"The one calling me a crazy mass murdering serial killer and suggesting that I myself was Lord Voldemort?" Harry returned, coldly. "I try not to rot my brain with trash. What do you want? This is the Auror Office, you shouldn't be here."

"I was wondering if you would like to give any comment?" she persisted.

"I don't see what the point is, when you twist my words either way," he bit out, eyes flashing.

She looked at him for a long moment, tucking a blonde curl behind her ear, legs crossing as she leant a little across his desk.

It would have been easy enough for her to get in, if she was already in the Ministry, and she'd shown herself to have a way of wriggling and wrangling her way into places she had no business being. Like near his home. He just wished he hadn't stayed late tonight, so he could be cornered like this.

Maybe he was trying to avoid having to go to bed, being alone with his own thoughts. He was meeting Ron and Hermione later. Hadn't worked out so well.

"Your co-operation would go a long way in ensuring that I wouldn't need to...flesh out the details to make it more interesting for public consumption," she murmured, head tilting. "I heard you met the self-named Lord Voldemort. Do you have any comments about that?"

"No."

She wetted her lips, the quill scribbling away next to her.
"Have you considered even for a moment that you might need someone in the prophet on your side?" she raised her brows, giving a small laugh. "Instead of, heavens forbid, simply pushing every journalist away with this curious and suspicious brand of hostility you seem to have."

His eyes narrowed a little as he studied her.
"And you think you're the journalist to do that," he noted. "In exchange for what?"

"Exclusive information," she replied, simply. "Crime scene photos. Lord Voldemort is the ultimate scoop." He stared at her, aghast, and she leaned over, sliding a business card over the table. "Think

about it, Harry. Because at the moment, sweetie, you're on a sinking ship whether I write a negative opinion on you or not. I can take back what I said about you. I can also make life more difficult."

"Are you going to that ministry function?"

Tom glanced up at the question. It was their normal session time, and he was very pleased with Harry's progress.

His boy was slowly opening up to him, so long as he was careful. That was the beauty of this, he wasn't prying Harry open, the other was unwittingly handing him the keys.

Maybe he knew, deep down, that he wanted to be saved. And Tom could make him into something perfect.

"Do you want me to?" he returned, lightly. Harry's lips thinned at the lack of straight answer, one hand running through already dishevelled hair.

"It would be nice to have some more people on my side. Maybe you'll keep some of the more inappropriate questions at bay. I don't know."

"A buffer," he verified, nearly smiling. Harry wetted his lips.

"Are you going or not?"

"Are you asking me to be your plus one?"

"Is that appropriate? Considering your my doctor," Harry asked, uncomfortably. "I mean, are there rules against this sort of stuff?"

"Not in the Wizarding World. My brand of 'mind-healing' is too new a trade, here, for any of the muggle rules to have been truly established." Some, but not if Harry initiated the interaction. Harry nodded, after a moment.

"I'd appreciate if you came."

"Just as well that I've been invited then," he murmured, favouring the other with a small smile. Harry huffed

"You made me go through that for nothing? What were you trying to prove?"

"When I met you, you refused to ask for any type of help from me, and were largely in denial of the human need for a support system," Tom pointed out. Harry grimaced.

"In other words, you were trying to check if my trust issues had improved or worsened," he bit out, eyes tight with annoyance. "Change my mind, you don't have to come. You're as bad as them."

He repressed a sigh.

"Harry. I would like to come with you."

"To make sure I don't crack?"

"Because I consider you my friend, and...I must have misread your question, I apologize." He deliberately bit his lip, let his composure crack unprofessionally for a second, before it turned blank and he looked away, before back. "Are you feeling up to discussing your nightmares yet?"

Harry's brow furrowed.

"What did you think I meant by my question?" he demanded.

"Normally, a plus one is a date," Tom said, after a long moment. Harry's eyes widened, before colour abruptly flooded his face.

"I-right-um-I suppose it does-er-" he hadn't thought of it like that, but now that Tom had mentioned it, he couldn't stop thinking of it like. He was pretty sure dating his psychiatrist crossed professional boundaries. He didn't even think of Tom that way. Though the man was an attractive bastard, and...

"I've made you uncomfortable. I'm sorry. My question was counterproductive."

"No-no...I mean, it's an, er, valid question. You'd want to establish I wasn't getting too close, too attached. I mean, if that happens, you have to refer me to someone else or drop me, don't you? That's what Hermione said about the rules. Um...yeah, no, I didn't mean it like that. Don't worry."

Why had Tom seemed so nervous though? Harry wetted his lips, cleared his throat.

"Right then," Tom concluded. "Do you still wish me to attend, solely in the parameters of moral support? I would be more than happy to. I will be there anyway. Many of my clients have extended the invitation."

Harry relaxed.

"They have?"

"Yes."

"Well, if you're there, anyway."

"Excellent."

He had a lot planned for this oh-so-special occasion.

Part One: 14

"Did you want it to be a date?" Harry asked, quietly. He was standing outside of the Ministry with Tom, shoulders hunching forwards and his hands stuffed into the pockets of his dark green dress robes against the brisk chill in the air. Tom's robes were black on the top, light and almost silky, with a hint of burgundy underneath and a white shirt.

The other glanced askance at him, looking almost surprised at the question.
"As you said," his psychiatrist murmured, "that would be inappropriate."

But it didn't answer the question. Harry's mouth felt dry, as he watched Tom, dropped his gaze, watched him again.

"Did you though?" he insisted. Tom studied him carefully in turn.

"Do you want me to want to? You seemed rather opposed to the idea when I suggested the implications of a plus one."

The lack of straight answer told him everything he needed to know - then again, Tom wasn't one for straight answers normally, so maybe he was just reading into it. He didn't know what to think of how to feel either way, and wetted his lips.

"I think Voldemort might be someone close to me," he said, instead, as they started walking up to the front door. It was an easier topic, familiar ground between them, if a little new in his revelation.

Tom glanced at him again, expression impassive though his eyebrows arched a little.
"Should I take that non-sequitur as an accusation?" he asked, mildly.

Harry's brow furrowed for a moment, eyes flickering with confusion, before his expression cleared.
"What? No - merlin - I didn't mean you. Sorry, bad conversation change there. I just-no it's not an accusation."

"Glad to hear it. That could have been counterproductive."

"Your biggest concern over being accused of being a mass murderer is that they'd be counterproductive to my therapy sessions?" Harry snorted.

Tom gave him a small smirk.
"I'm very dedicated to my job."

The ballroom was exquisitely if ostentatiously decorated, with glittering lights overhead and a large dance floor which gleamed beneath their feet. Harry hovered uncomfortably on the edge of the room, not stepping into the swirl of different colours and fabrics and faces, frantically trying to search out a familiar face or head of ginger hair.

Tom was regarding him quietly, the smirk having faded for something more serious.

"Have you reported your theory to the other Aurors? Do you have any idea who it could be?"

Harry shook his head to both.
"I'm looking into it. Possible motivations. People powerful and intelligent enough to pull it off. Would have to be a master Occlumens, otherwise I would already know who it was. I'd be able to sense the

emotions the second I stepped near them. At the moment it's only during murder that he becomes...unfettered. Though I suspect he's manipulating what I get there too. Course he is. I get it because he wants me to get it. Maybe it's Snape. He's good at that mind stuff and his attempts to teach me Occlumency were crap. Fits the criteria in some ways. Hated my father, could be why he killed him."

"Severus Snape?" Tom murmured.

"You're skeptical?" Harry returned.

"No," Tom said. "It's a logical conclusion. I'm also not, however, entirely convinced either without proof."

Harry ran a hand through his hair. Proof was a reasonable demand. He needed proof. Something other than shadows to cling to and grasp at.

The next second they'd been spotted and swept into the party.

The thought still lingered.

The ball was alright, all things considered including his own awkwardness on such occasions. Though, he had to admit, he was a damn sight better than he had been in his fourth year.

He cringed at the memories.

He moved around the room, mingling and dancing with different people, still trying to find Ron and Hermione amongst the crowd.

Tom dispersed from him from a while, but mercifully didn't stray too far when the uncomfortable questions started, or to those who viewed him in a less than friendly light or suspicion in regards to the Voldemort case.

Harry knew Tom was a famous psychiatrist, of course, but it was only outside of the context of their private sessions in Tom's office that he realized to what extent this was.

The other appeared highly respected, and seemed to know everyone with a lot of influence. It reminded him of his initial reluctance over mind healers - they knew too much, too intimately, about too many people.

They were in an enormous position of power, especially if they abused it.
He swallowed.

Tom wasn't like that though. Tom...helped. He was good.

"Harry?" He glanced over, startled, when the familiar weight of the other's hand settled on his shoulder. "Alright?" Tom scrutinized him carefully.

Harry forced a smile, before nodding, thoughts spinning over a new idea now.
"Yeah, I'm fine. Thanks."

Tom glanced around them briefly, at the bustle of people already swarming for attention, before sliding his other hand around Harry's waist and pulling him round on the dance floor, settling smoothly in with the music.

The people drifted back, at bay out of whatever sense of politeness they had.

"Talk to me," Tom instructed quietly.

Harry didn't say anything immediately, half pulled away from dancing, embarrassed, but Tom's grip was surprisingly secure and squirming away would cause more of a scene then just dancing with the man. Even if Tom was dancing with him for the sake of uninterrupted private conversation. He swallowed.

"You must feel very powerful, doing your job," he murmured, finally. "People give you their weakest points, trust you with it. You must have a tremendous amount of influence on people."

Tom watched him carefully.

"And this disturbs you?"

"Well, yeah," Harry said, honestly. "Though that's not really my current line of thought. I just..." he wetted his lips, growing more animated as he thought it out in his head. "I assumed Voldemort was someone of great magical power, because that would account for his self-obsessed sense of superiority, and how easily he gets his victims to comply to his wishes. There are never signs of a struggle, after all. I mean, with me and you, he just blackmailed me into doing what he wanted instead of using force..." Harry's eyes focused again from where he'd drifted, to find Tom still listening intently. "Sorry. I'm just thinking aloud at you. This is supposed to be a party."

"By all means," Tom looked amused. "Feel free to continue." There was that same razor sharp intelligence present though, despite the reassuring smirk he received. "You think if Voldemort doesn't have magical power, he must have another type of power. Like, as your once again offensive non-sequitur suggests, a psychiatrist."

Harry offered a sheepish grin.
"Sorry. But yeah, exactly. Like a psychiatrist. Or a...teacher. Anyone that the people in the victim range would naturally trust."

"Like an Auror," Tom said quietly. Harry's eyes snapped up, and he swallowed.

"Like an Auror," he accepted, mulling over the thought. That worked too. Alarmingly well actually with the other evidence. "Flexible timing, though he works primarily in the evening and the night, with the bodies found in the morning. So teacher isn't ruled out either."

"So position of power. Close to you. Intelligent. Looking ominous for constructive therapy sessions," Tom murmured. "I mean, aside from that I apparently beat up, torture and threaten to kill myself."

Harry snorted, not really very amused.

"Well, that puts a disturbed light on things. Merlin," he muttered, before shaking his head. "No, if it was you, I'd...be far more...changed by now. He said he wanted me broken. You don't do that. Hell, if anything you're the only thing-" he stopped himself, throat bobbing. It seemed too vulnerable to admit that, even thoughtlessly. He didn't much like the thought of how much he was relying on Tom nowadays, however much he was also grateful for it. "Unless he was lying," he got himself back on track, continying. "And considering I could feel how delighted he was by the statement, I don't think he was."

"Glad to see my name is cleared then," Tom said. "Would you like me to give you a name of some other mind healers in my field?"

"Thanks," Harry murmured. "But I think I'm going to go over the victim list again with this in mind. There has to be some correlation. Some place where he would meet the victims, which they all have in common. A service they all have taken. I'll check when they were at Hogwarts too."

Spurred by progress after so long, Harry offered an apologetic smile and pulled away again, only for Tom to tighten his grip again. Harry's brow furrowed in confusion.

"You work too much," Tom said, seriously. "Have you considered that? What happened to having the night off?"

"Voldemort could be picking out another victim...and you want me to dance?" Harry demanded incredulously. "The sooner the case is solved, the better." He suddenly flushed. "Um. Not that I'm ditching you as my plus one. Well, I am."

"Rude."

"Sorry."

"I understand. Duty calls," Tom said, giving him a small smile. Harry suddenly felt guilty. Because he had invited Tom as his...plus one. Even if he still didn't have a clue what to think of that.

Hell, it was hard enough knowing that what he was feeling was actually him, without contemplating further on the potentially blurred lines between liking someone and needing them.

Tom could probably be the first to tell him that his 'clients' often sought to supplement a professional relationship to justify and feel better about the uneven power balance of knowledge. .

Either way, actually doing anything about it when he didn't have a clue wasn't a good idea. He wasn't...stable enough at the moment to be involved in anything. Tom had to understand that. He couldn't be too offended or anything.

Now he was just giving himself a headache.

"Thanks for listening to me talk about work. Again."

The song was coming to a close, anyway, switching to something more upbeat.

"You'll be alright getting home?" Tom checked. Harry flushed, though the concern was...sweet, he guessed.

"Yeah. Big bad Auror here. I'll just go find Ron and Hermione...apologize for leaving early and all that."

Tom laughed, stepping back.
"Don't forget to mention it to your boss, too."

Harry nearly groaned, smiled and wandered away to let Tom dance with somebody else. He certainly had enough people eyeing him up.

He was almost at the door when it started.

The relish Tom had felt for the 'evening's entertainment' couldn't help but be soured and diminished by his conversation with Harry, and his only contemplations therein.

He was starting to wonder if this game wasn't getting too dangerous, because as much as he adored toying with the boy, he refused to go to prison for the thrill when he could just shift it onto a much more...private board.

Harry was more fun alive, but he'd kill him if it became necessary. He hoped Harry wouldn't be so selfish as to force him to that.

He'd been tracking his plants around the room quietly, and even with his mood darkened, he couldn't help but note how flawlessly everything else was going.

The music switched, to a rather cheery instrumental version of 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' around the same time the bodies fell from the ceiling.

They weren't real, but people immediately started screaming and rushing to the edges of the room or towards the door.

Harry froze, pushed forwards again with the other Aurors, trying to calm the delicious panic in the room.

The boy dropped to examining the bodies, quickly figuring out they were merely very lifelike transfigurations. He'd considered using Inferi and having them walk in, because their terror over the lack of security would have been truly delightful, but they would have burned his art before they got the message. This was better.

That, didn't, however, mean that the twelve bodies didn't represent anything.

This time, however, he'd refrained from leaving his emotions on the scene, but the pinned butterfly corsages should indicate well enough, and it wasn't sloppy enough to be a copycat.

Such a shame he couldn't watch, but he was sure Harry would fill him in.

He stepped out along with everyone else, and set about doing his best to 'help'.

Harry felt the blood run out of his face as he dropped to his knees by the bodies. He had a moment of utter horror, and it took far too long for any of them to realize they weren't real. That they were transfigured.

Tonks had pointed it out, recognizing the signs of morphing and appearance changing.

The world was spinning. He couldn't breathe - picked up a note clearly addressed to him.

"What is it?" Robards demanded.

His fingers were so steady he could almost convince himself he didn't feel like he was going to pass out.

"Twelve bodies representing twelve upcoming murders in the next twelve days," Harry muttered, voice cracking. "He's given us their identities. And...what's going to happen to them and how they're going to be found."

"Why the hell would he do that?" Dawlish grunted. "Bit stupid. Now we can stop him."

"Unless he's trying to prove that we can't," Ron groaned. "That he'll get to them anyway."

"What does the note say?" Scrimgeour questioned, striding over to him to snatch it.

Twelve days. Twelve gifts. Twelve lives at stake.
You have everything you need to solve the puzzle.
Merry Christmas, love.

The heart is nothing without the head.

Part One: 15

Harry wore out the floorboards in his office, striding up and down in the small area as if mere still couldn't contain the restless ferocity of his thoughts.

Twelve victims. Twelve days, and - if the song seared in the back of his mind, playing throughout the crime scene was to be believed, twelve days of Christmas.

A Partridge in a Pear Tree - Petunia Dursley

A Turtle Dove - Cho Chang

A French Hen - Fleur Delacour

A Colly bird - Marge Dursley

A Golden Ring - Dudley Dursley

A Geese laying - Vernon Dursley

A Swan Swimming - Nymphadora Tonks

A Maid milking - Molly Weasley

A Lady dancing - Gilderoy Lockhart

A Lord Leaping - Cedric Diggory

A Piper Piping - Barnabus Cuff

A Drummer Drumming - Rufus Scrimgeour

Today was the first day - Petunia Dursley, and there was an awful dryness to Harry's mouth. He hadn't talked to any of his relatives in years, so it unnerved to have them all dragged onto this list. Presumably for their connection to him.

Harry's heart pounded as he figured Voldemort probably meant some of these as a gift - a gift against the boredom and loneliness of Christmas, and against the childhood he'd endured with the Dursleys.

A Partridge in a pear tree. The cultural symbolism of a pear tree was strength, fortitude. A partridge...a partridge stole eggs from other bird's nests. He rubbed his eyes, paced up and down his office.

Whether he was supposed to be working on this case was a point of contention in the Department, considering he was useful but far too closely tied to the events. However, with both Scrimgeour and Tonks, targeted too, it was finally decided between blurred lines that it was all hands on deck for the next twelve dears.

Harry's head swum with the possibility of the death, of the horrible sense that he might not be able to save them. But he'd saved Tom, despite the price, so he had to believe he could stop these twelve murders happening too.

Security had been put to maximum, and all the potential victims had immediately been drawn into custody and tested for any poisons already in their system.

Harry hadn't gone to see them yet - specifically trying to avoid the Dursleys perhaps, and all the relics of his past scattered among the list. Bile clawed up in his throat.

If Harry could, without guilt, do so, this was one of those days where he would have handed in his immediate resignation. He'd been up all night, along with the rest of the Auror Department, surviving on caffeine and a nauseating worry.

All resources had been pulled for the crisis, and the world was starting to feel muggy and frayed at the edges. He'd done everything he could, of course, and every scrap of defence had gone into ensuring that nobody could get to the chosen few.

He scrubbed his eyes, wished he could do more now, immediately, but there was nothing.
This was an unprecedented situation, which the department was struggling to handle.

Petunia would apparently be burnt alive. His eyes squeezed shut at the thought. They'd had a hard time identifying the fake body in the char, and though his childhood had been anything but the best he wouldn't wish such a fate on anyone.

Burning. Witch trials. Voldemort obviously somehow knew about his past, of the word 'freak' that could still make him flinch and the smothering hatred towards magical kind, now inverted without mercy.

If the threats were to be believed, she would be dead by the end of the day.

Whilst they waited, they tried to think some more on the matter of Voldemort's identity, because surely the monster couldn't kill anyone else or orchestrate murder from behind bars? Attacking the root was the best thing they could do, because then at least it couldn't spread anymore poison.

Somebody close to him. Somebody who knew his past. Somebody with influence, that all the previous victims would naturally trust. Somebody with some type of knowledge about human anatomy to be able to manipulate and remove organs so easily?

Hearts, brains, liver, tongues, strips off the back. There were all sorts of things, for all sorts of different effects, if he pooled every possible Voldemort case, suspected or confirmed, under one umbrella.

The butterflies were merely the most recent, the most sensationalized and branded by the papers.

He tried to think, because if he was doing something useful, he...

He should probably go down. If this went wrong, with the stifling number of things unsaid between himself and his aunt.

He determinedly flipped open another old case file, feeling sick.

Severus Snape, as a Potion's Master among other things, would have a working knowledge of anatomy. So would any healer or doctor, really, and some members of the Aurors. Their medical expert, for example.

Of course, that also put Tom firmly under suspicion too, even if Harry doubted he was really the killer. Still, he'd be neglecting his job if he ignored it, and he couldn't put blossoming...friendship over

the lives of twelve people, including his family and friends.

Riddle was a doctor too, and would be more than capable of such high level surgery as required to remove organs, especially with the aid of magic. Though his medical education had no doubt been psychological, there was a lot of biology involved in such things too.

This was a bloody mess.
He felt far older than he had any right to as he strode out the door.

"I want Severus Snape taken into custody," he started.

It would be a lie to say Petunia Dursley had never wanted anything to do with the Wizarding World. When Lily first got her letter, she'd been desperate to share in the magic, to join her sister on this adventure that sounded so much more exciting than anything her own existence had to offer.

When she was refused, when they explained that she could never be part of that world, the shift began. Wonder soured to a bitter resentment, which only hardened and congealed into something ugly in her chest.

Magic took her sister away from her, twice - first as children, plunged apart to two sides of the spectrum that it was impossible to connect on. Their parents had always loved Lily more, beautiful, magic Lily who married a rich husband whilst she plodded along and convinced herself that normal was better because that was the only way she could hope to be better too. Not inferior like their pitying smiles suggested when they looked at her dull eyes and limp hair, compared to flames and verdant jewels in her sister's eyes.

Then it was gone forever, with murder, and hatred in return.
Nothing in the Wizarding World had ever bought her anything good.

Really, she should have expected something like this, but frightened thoughts had no patch on the reality of the secure white room around her, and being torn away from her ordinary life as if didn't even matter.

It galled her to simply be a piece in a madman's game, as if her life didn't matter except in reference to her thrice damned nephew.

Her husband and son were uncommonly silent next to her, Vernon's red faced blustering faded a long time ago as they were surrounded by those others doomed to be murdered in the safe room. She'd built a life, what right did these magic folk have to shove their way into her carefully kept home and tear that apart? Margery just seemed bewildered as to proceedings, having never even heard of magic before.

Why did this have to happen to her family? Petunia had made it clear she wanted nothing to do with any of them, with a reminder of her sister blinking up at her for so many years, but they hadn't listened. They'd used their power to force an intruder into their home, despite how unwelcome he was.

She just wanted to go home.
She didn't want to die today - couldn't believe that she would - squeezed her eyes shut and breathed.

She wondered if they'd kill her like they killed Lily.

She'd heard that the house went up in flames.

When the first spark came, she barely even noticed but for Dudley's screaming.

Tom was a little surprised, but not shocked, to have Harry turn up at his freshly fixed and renovated office space.

The boy looked even more tired than when they had first met, where he'd seemed frayed around the edges, curling to crisp like the edges of a piece of paper set on fire.

Now, what had been bags under his eyes had sunken, like shadows gouged into his skin with an exhaustion that he'd been building for a while now. If he'd looked like one push would shatter him before, now he looked like he was already broken.

Harry really had no idea how fragile he seemed to other people, with his delicate glasses and those beautiful green eyes that screamed out his emotions even now, even if he'd mastered composing his tone and his body language otherwise.

Tom knew better than to think he was really broken. The ruins were smudged over him, debris from splinters and cracks and holes gouged here and there...but there was still that untouched core there which he so admired.

If Harry had been like the other victims, a weak mess after a tragic past, he would have just toyed with him and killed him a long time ago for the simple snipping of a loose string. But Harry had turned out to be a rather unexpected delight, when he'd finally come across the child again when he re-entered the wizarding world.

He hadn't seen it immediately, it was well hidden, but when the realization hit he couldn't shake it. Harry was like him.

So he would use the string to tug him closer first, satisfy his curiosity, walk the knife edge between conflicting desires because he'd always coveted trophies and exquisite things.

Whether in the end he would kill him or not, was still up in the air, and his indecision on the matter concerned himself too.

But nonetheless. He straightened, rearranged his features appropriately.

"Is something the matter?" he asked, lowly. "I'm in the middle of a session with another patient."

"I need you to come to the station."
Ah. He could tell by Harry's face that he wasn't really accusing him of anything, this was a necessary precaution in a time of great stress. Utterly inconvenient, but...not unexpected.

"I should hope this is a formality?" he checked, either way, but nodded nonetheless. "Of course, whatever I can do to help confirm my innocence."

"Sorry." Harry sounded truly guilty about all of this, and maybe it said something that the boy had come alone, as if this was a social call rather than an arrest.

It was adorable.

"I'll just wrap up," he murmured. "I understand you're on a tight schedule, but..."

"Of course."
Tom gestured to the waiting room, watched Harry sit and turned back to his patient in the office, letting the door shut - thinking how deceptively small Harry looked now, swallowed up by the soft sofa.

He would have loved to dress the boy up in fine materials and silks, expensive robes and suits - like the green he'd wore to the Christmas Party, so Slytherin in colour. Harry didn't know of Tom's own heritage, not really, but to see the grown up version of the child he'd intended to murder...who in other paths and prophecies...

He liked seeing Harry in his colours.

He looked the epitome of calm when he turned to his patient - Bellatrix Lestrange.

"Is there a problem?" she questioned, with those dark eyes fixed on him unflinchingly.

"I'm afraid something has come up, Miss Lestrange. Perhaps we could continue this at another more suitable time?"

She gave him a demure smile, that tipped mad at the edges, and stood up.
"Of course, Doctor. Was that Auror Potter at the door?"

"Yes."

"Dreadful what happened at the ball," she said lightly, a gleam in her eyes. He could almost have smiled, tipped his head, but remained impassive.

"The worst."

She gave a small, delighted laugh and moved away.

Aside from Harry, she was probably his favourite client...in her own way, of course.

He turned back to Harry, after straightening his sleeves and smoothing out any creases in his suit, expression suitably serious.

He was dying to make a handcuff comment, he really was, but considering the circumstances that would be rather suspect and merely followed silently, accepting Harry's arm for side-along apparition to the ministry.

A few people glanced at him as they entered the Auror Department, with his hands secured neatly in front of him. It was more show, than anything that would realistically hold him in his power, but he saw no reason to give away all of his advantages.

Instead, he sat firmly in Harry's sight in his office, as the panic of his crimes buzzed frantically around him in white noise, let his eyes move over the pictures on the wall.

Like with his own snapshots with the polyjuiced Crouch, Harry's office was practically a homage to him. It was very flattering - all the photos and strings and notes that tracked a growing obsession on the part of the victim too. He could have given a pleased smile.

The only thing missing off the board was a name and a face. He'd seen a dour Potion's Master here now too, and the Prophet would no doubt be giving an announcement on the situation too.

He glanced at the clock, watched the minutes of the first day tick down.
Petunia Dursley. He devoured Harry's obvious distraction on the matter, watching him pace.

Getting this close was dangerous and risky, but he found it far more rewarding than distance. Nothing could beat that worried lip, those flickering eyes and tangled hair.

Harry was starting to reflect the ugly mess he was inside. Tom found it beautiful.

"Do you want to talk?" he asked. "Seeing as I'm here anyway."

"Seeing as you're a suspect, I probably shouldn't," Harry muttered. Tom watched him carefully, knew he couldn't push, however much he was dying to pick the other's brain on events.

He simply gave a nod, went back to a book he'd picked up, and watching Harry pace up and down the room.

It was only about ten minutes later that Harry gave an exasperated huff, flopping down.
He raised his brows, more concerned with the fact that the first stage would be starting soon.

It was very soon midnight, and nobody had died yet, after all.

"Do you think I should go and see them?" Harry asked, out of the blue. "I probably should."
Tom blinked - figured that he should be flattered that the other thought he was a mind reader. Well, he was, but it wasn't quite so simple as comics would make people believe.

"See who?"

Harry glanced at him, took his glasses off, wiped them in a way that was becoming rather familiar when he didn't particularly want to look or meet anyone's gaze.

"My relatives. The Dursleys. Voldemort put them on his twelve day execution list."

"I'm sorry."

He could almost taste the issues bubbling beneath the surface, the ugly splinters of a broken childhood, and he almost felt possessive knowing that even indirectly he was the cause.

He'd killed Harry's parents, and thus claimed the boy's life in some way as he'd own for the hand he'd had in shaping it.

Harry shook his head jerkily at the words, the meaningless apology that changed nothing about the situation, half stood, only for alarms to start screeching and the aurors to start running.

Definitely time.

Harry was out the door in a second, and he followed - knowing he was even more secure in his 'supposed' innocence than before. The other's eyes were wild.

"What's happening?"

The only thing they caught sight of was Petunia Dursley on flames as the team rushed in too late to try and save her.

Tom hid a smile, and drank in his reaction.

Harry sagged, eyes squeezing shut.

Then he'd thrown his desk across the office, magic flaring, and *screamed*.

Part One: 16

Harry stared numbly at the floor.

He was aware of the rest of the Aurors moving around him, of orders exchanged and of people tentatively enquiring if he was okay.

It washed in and out of his ears like white-noise, seeming so very far away.
He should have gone to see her. He could have stopped it. Instead he'd been a coward, unable to face the scars of his childhood and maybe Voldemort had known the one thing that would freeze him all along.

He could face things in the magical world far more easily, he could walk up to a mass murdering serial killer without flinching...but to stare back at his own memories and the shadow of a helpless child?

He'd never wanted to look at that again. He'd thought it was all shoved back into the cupboard under the stairs where he would never have to think of those years of his life again.

He felt the warm weight of a hand against his shoulder where he was on his knees, magic still raging around him, even in its exhausted state. Tom. He drew in a shuddering breath.

"*How*?" he croaked, "how the hell did he do it? We had the place secured. We checked for any spells before hand! She was supposed to be safe." The words were practically a hiss by the end. He looked up, staring hard, trying desperately to think for answers.

"He got Scrimgeour to do it," Dawlish muttered, sounding ashamed. Harry wanted to crumble. The other victims. Of course.

The Ministry had very limited safe rooms, and so whilst they hadn't put all of the targeted in the same room, there had been some. They'd made the decision that, just in case, having someone magical in a room with muggles would make them safer. That if Voldemort tried to break in, he couldn't just murder them so easily without a fight.

Harry's eyes squeezed shut. So they'd put an Auror in with them. His boss.
Oh god.

He tried to force himself to concentrate, around the scramble, around the aching hollowness of *heshouldhavehadthatconversatio*n. In a perfect world, where people made the right decisions on such things, he would have got down, and whatever the outcome of the day he would have got some sense of closure.

Now there was just a gaping wound, which could be stitched, but would never fully fade, lingering with the what ifs.

"I want to see the tape."

"Mate," Ron began.

"*I want to see the tape and the crime scene*."

They showed him the tape first, so that he knew what to expect. He watched carefully for any signs, anything of note that could help him identity Voldemort once and for all.

There was no warning, nothing. Scrimgeour's eyes just suddenly glazed, and the next second he'd cast a spell at his Aunt, and she was burning whilst he watched.

They'd immediately separated all of the targets to different rooms now, but Harry doubted Voldemort would pull the same trick twice. It wasn't his style.

No, he'd already proved how easily he could slip past any defenses that they made, even when they thought they were safe, they were just as exposed and vulnerable as before.

There was no rush of emotions in the crime scene, none except his own anyway and Harry didn't like to think he was disappointed, that maybe some part of him had desperately been seeking the balm of Voldemort's happiness to temporarily soothe the sorrow in his own heart.

That was just sick.

For the first time, he was honestly worried that the serial killer would win, that they wouldn't catch him, and of what he himself was turning into if the only solace he could currently find was in the disturbed mind of the one tormenting him in the first place.

The air stank of ash, and char, and he couldn't breathe.
He wanted to scream all over again.

But he had come to rectify a previous conclusion of his.
Voldemort was powerful, and not just in position. Magically. But that didn't take away from his belief that he was also powerful in position.

Which narrowed things down a bit more. And it didn't cut Tom or Snape out as suspects either.

His first thought was that it proved their innocence actually - that was what the rest of the department seemed to think. But. But...

Well, it didn't really prove anything.

The other Aurors were working under the assumption that a spell powerful enough to overpower Scrimgeour, would have had to have an on the spot trigger that brought the dormant compulsion out, rather than one that activated on its own. There was no obvious stimuli after all, no clock in the room or light to indicate what time of day it was, and no trigger words had been spoken in the man's vicinity.

So it would, admittedly, seem logical that Voldemort himself did something long distance to trigger it, and both Tom and Snape had been under their watch and nothing like that had happened with them, so it couldn't be them.

But still, Harry couldn't help doubting...

There was something nagging at his mind, something he couldn't place, itching a warning if only he could decipher it.

He suspected Voldemort was, instead, more powerful than they could ever have imagined.

But he had no evidence, just that something in his gut that he couldn't shake.

Because Voldemort was close to him, and he was fed up.
He was starting to get the awful feeling that lines of red tape and paperwork weren't going to help catch this monster, and even if he hated it, that they needed him to catch Voldemort. To do more than just observe the emotions and make comments about intentions on crime scenes.

He didn't need to just reluctantly understand, he had to claw close so he could rip the man's bloody heart out for all he'd done.

He had to use the mind connection.
The thought had occurred to him before, of course. It was like not wanting to see the Dursleys in his fear of his own path - he was terrified of the connection, for the dark places it could take him and the very real possibility that he'd get lost in the shadows and not walk out again.

But he was already lost and strung up helplessly in a spider web of shadows, especially if his nightmares were to believe.

He wondered if Voldemort was aware that in this last attack, in this attempt to break him for good under the crushing weight of guilt, he'd revealed his weakness to him and allowed him to fashion it into a weapon instead of something that froze him on the spot.

He was craving the emotions, the taste of glee in his mouth and the rush of power Voldemort's feelings gave him. Maybe the monster thought he'd shy away from that, certainly, he wanted to. He'd been running away from it for so long now.

It was time to stop running. Voldemort had caught up with him anyway.
So he would hold still and fight, instead of trying to race the man.

As he stared down at the charred spot on the floor, he felt his expression steel with determination.

He'd had enough of being the victim.

Vernon knew that many of these freaks looked down on him, scorned him, hated him even with as much vitriol as he despised them.

But he'd never asked to get involved with them. There hadn't even be the opportunity to say goodbye to his beloved Tuny, she was just scorched on the spot by the freak supposed to protect them.

The British Government would never have allowed that to happen. These Authorities were useless, and yet still had the gall to condescend him and act like they were better.

Dudley was white faced beside him, eyes wide with a horror he should never have had to witness, and red-rimmed with tears they'd sworn to keep him from ever having to shed.

He was their child, grown boy or not. Part of him wanted to stiffly snap at the boy to stop snivelling, that such a show of weakness would only encourage the freaks to attack them more, but he didn't have the heart to.

He knew he'd never hated Harry Potter more.
He should have killed the boy when he had the chance, wished the brat had died rather than ever coming from them, because he was poison.

A letter had explained that the boy was special, but he didn't think any child could ever be more special than his own, and that normal was better than white walls and his wife's screams still echoing

in his ears.

Maybe he'd had some skeptical hope that they'd save him and his family at the start, but it was gone now. They cared more about their own kind anyway. The fact they were chosen as mere puppets in somebody else's show screamed just how unimportant their lives were considered in the grand scheme of things.

"Is that's what's gonna happen to us?" Dudley asked.

And he didn't have a single answer he could give.

Harry felt more composed sitting at his session with Tom.

He'd been discharged for the night, rather forcibly at that, with the comment that he was absolutely no help to anyone in his current state.

It didn't hurt any less, and the guilt was still there and he doubted he'd ever shake that either, but there was a sense of calm that had been lacking in the last few months.

Tom was watching him silently, perhaps waiting for him to talk, head tilted to one side.
Maybe he could tell something was different, Harry didn't know.

"I'm going to kill him," Harry murmured.

"Voldemort." It wasn't a question. He should probably feel concerned about admitting such a thing, but he was past the point of caring.

He didn't deign the statement with a response, eyes dark.

"I don't care if it's what he wants," he bit out. "He's dead."

"If it's not too insensitive of me to bring it up at such a terrible time...you do not seem to have the best relationship with your family?"

"No. We hate each other. Maybe that makes it worse. It's just...unfinished."
He didn't know how to express it, didn't want to talk about it. Talking with Tom was remarkable for helping him clear his thoughts, but it hardly meant anything right now. He just felt frustrated sitting here, in the cool office, with all that was going on. "I'm going to talk to my Uncle tomorrow. I figured I should give him some time first. As much time as he can have, given the circumstances," he continued.

Tom continued to study him, that soothing point of silence and calm.

"I can't just let more people die either. I know - it's different because he was more distanced, it didn't feel like I was killing her too this time. It was too indirect."

His thoughts were a mess. He had his one piece, his shard of resolve to see this finished, but everything else was crumbling to dust around it. The only difference was that he no longer cared.

Maybe he'd been stupid to believe he'd survive this, that Voldemort would ever really let him go after that first failed attempt to kill him.

"Why do you suppose a serial killer would bother to try and kill a one year baby?" he asked, eyes distant. "I wasn't his normal preference. Neither was my mother. So why?"

"Only Voldemort can answer that, I'm afraid," Tom said quietly. Harry hummed.

"He doesn't like loose strings. I'm one of them. I'm the gold ticket victim, you could say. Everything suggests all of this, all of these murders and games, are simply a countdown to my own death. But it's been over twenty years, so why hasn't he done it yet? It's not that he lacks the opportunity, today proved that well enough. I've had so many theories on that one."

He wasn't even sure if he was talking to Tom now, or just to himself, but the other's eyes didn't leave him for a second.

"He wants to convert me. To change me. To make me like him, but in a man of tied knots, something must have inspired that in the first place. Something in our connection. He wants to be understood, and I understand him." His voice softened, even as it held no mercy. "It's not as contrived as love, I suppose we've known each other too long for that. But I do think he's lonely, and believes I'm the only one capable of understanding the full scale of his vision - whether willingly or not."

He dropped his eyes away from the other, twisting his hands in his lap.

"And yet...he tried to kill me before any of this. It was already a break in the pattern he is showing. Of course, he's not tied so simply to any patterns or compulsions of murders, but it's obvious that he still has his favourites. So what caused the initial break? I can't find out if I don't know who he is, and yet that choice may be the key behind who he is and all of this."

He glanced up, caught a hint of something in Tom's eyes, before it was gone and vanished for the normal mask his psychiatrist wore.

And where had the word 'mask' even come from for Tom's face?

"You know," he continued, to the silence. "We always talk about me. We never talk about you. They say people become psychiatrists so that they can diagnose and fix themselves. What happened to you, Tom?"

It was the first time he'd ever seen the man without a comeback, and he gave a thin smile.

"This is your time, Harry," Riddle replied eventually.

"You keep saying that but it means nothing," Harry retorted, a vicious lack of patience in his voice, everything squirming together until his hea wasd pounding. So much data, so much blood behind his eyes and indirectly on his hands too, and no sleep but for those dreams that were beginning to haunt his waking moments as well as his nights in an entirely different way... "but you don't do anything. You give people the tools to fix themselves, you said that yourself, and if they can't you just sit there in your cosy world and your fancy bloody suit and watch them crumble!"

He was practically screaming the words by the end, and maybe he was furious with himself and his own inaction in his Aunt's death too.

"Harry-"

"You may not be Voldemort, but in some way you're as bad as him," Harry continued, relentlessly, feeling his breathing beginning to increase. "You just sit there like a stone, whilst people give you their trust and their problems, and just chuck it back at them with some bad instructions."

"I have an extremely high success rate with my clients, actually." It was the first time that Harry had ever heard such sharpness in Tom's voice. "I believe that is why you were sent to me, and because you didn't want someone poking around your head with the hammer and nails, believing they had some magical cure to your problems."

Harry's jaw clenched, eyes flashing. He couldn't help but feel betrayed by the comment, and maybe the truth in it.

He felt frustrated and he didn't know how to articulate any of what he wanted or needed, outside of Voldemort's imminent capture.

Tom's expression softened again, as the other stood up from his remote chair and moved over to him, placing a hand over his, kneeling in front of him.

"If you want, or need, more help from me than the limited analysis you have thus far allowed me to give, all you need to do is ask," he murmured, ducking his head to hold Harry's gaze where he'd at first slid it away. His finger caressed the pulse point at his wrist. "I can up your treatment, if you give your consent to that."

Harry swallowed, squeezed his eyes shut, torn - needing someone to stitch the ruined material of his facade back together again, because he was scared if Voldemort kept ripping and slashing and tearing chunks of it out and smashing it, he was eventually going to get to the center core.

If that happened, he had no delusions of victory, whatsoever.
It was currently the only thing untouched and keeping him standing.

He drew in a deep breath, opened his eyes again, nodded, half wanted to run.

Did he trust Tom? Despite everything?

"Yes."

He needed all the help he could get. He'd always thought it a stupid myth that men had to face monsters alone.

Part One: 17

Hermione steeled a breath, before knocking on the the door of Doctor Riddle's office, trying not to feel intimidated.

She'd read all about the man before recommending Harry to him, of course. He'd emerged back into society about a fair few years ago, after taking time to travel abroad during which he studied at a Wizarding Healer Academy in Venice, before branching out into his own work in the art. He'd been a top student at Hogwarts too, before his travels, and Head Boy - so he was obviously very responsible, and the references he had from colleagues abroad only proved that further.

Despite his young age, he was considered prestigious and learned.

Harry had stopped talking to her and Ron about anything. Maybe because they weren't under a confidentiality agreement...she cursed herself for the petty, insecure thought.

Harry had never talked to them much before, either, not without weeks and weeks of coaxing. Even then, she always suspected he didn't tell them everything. He didn't want to worry them, and, perhaps realistically, they couldn't understand everything however hard they tried. Not really.

She supposed she should feel relieved that she couldn't understand, but she still wished she could, if only so he didn't have to bear such a heavy load solely on his own shoulders.

That was what Riddle had been for - she'd thought that if anyone could help her best friend, it would be him. He was different in his fields as well, so she'd rightly assumed he could get Harry to put up with him without just storming out in the first five minutes.

But to put it simply; she was worried.

The door swung open, and his eyes moved over her for a moment, before his head tilted and he offered a singularly charming smile.

"Miss Granger..." he raised his brows. "This is an unexpected pleasure. May I help you with something?"

She'd only met him once before, and most of their correspondence in arranging Harry's psychiatry sessions had been done via mail. It was something of a special circumstance, after all, to skip a rather long waiting list for the psychiatrist's services.

Even with Harry's position, and the necessity of the arrangement, it had only been luck that she'd even got the initial booking for him - though she'd never told Harry that. She didn't think his feeling pressured about the sessions would have helped first meetings at all.

Neville Longbottom had dropped out, taking an extended holiday to the Danum Valley, in Malaysia, to get some reprieve and write his book about the rare plants found there. And so, Harry's space had opened.

"I was wondering if we could talk?" she tried joking weakly, before sobering. "It's about Harry. I'm worried about him. Are you free at all?"

He gave another smile.

"I was just going to have some lunch. Please, come in. Have you ever tried stuffed peppers before?"

She was forced to shake his head, as he immediately moved over to where he had his lunch set out delicately on his desk, and flushed.

"Oh, I couldn't-"

"I made too much, and it would be rude of me to dine alone."

He conjured a plate with an elegant flick of his wrist, setting it down in front of her and levitating some of the stuffed peppers on it, before pulling over a chair so she could sit. He paused to smoothly take her coat and set it aside, before tucking her in.

"Thank you." It really did look and smell absolutely amazing - a roasted red pepper, stuffed with rice, herbs and meat which seemed to be pork or lamb. She took a bite at his gesture, swallowed. "It's delicious. You're an excellent cook. What type of meat is this?"

"Lamb," he replied, neatly. "With some flavouring I discovered during my travels in Asia."

That would explain the slightly different taste, not immediately familiar as lamb.

He ate in silence, his eyes fixed on her.

"You realize that I cannot discuss Harry's treatment due to patient confidentiality," he stated, finally, voice barely above a murmur. "Though I understand that you may be concerned about him, given recent developments. Has he not talked to you about any of it?"

Hermione gave a small, helpless shrug, tucking an errant strand of hair behind her ear.

"I've barely seen him, and he doesn't really seem to talk to anyone. He's so...isolated. I...can't help but fear he's starting to let Voldemort in, what with recent developments. Can you at least tell me if you're getting anywhere with him and if he'll be okay? If the treatment is working?"

He took another measured bite of his meal.

"I'm doing everything I can, Miss Granger, rest assured," he said, sympathetically. She drew in a breath, nodded.

"I know - I know - it's just - he doesn't talk. I mean, he didn't talk to us much before, but now he has you...sorry, I don't mean to cause any offence. I'm glad you're helping him, I just-is there anything I can do?"

She heard the door go again, and he paused.

"My," he murmured. "I am popular today...if you could excuse me for just a moment..."

He rose, moving around her and heading for the door. She twisted her head, couldn't see who was there between the psychiatrist's back, and the door. There was a flash of blond hair, before he'd stepped out into his waiting room and shut the door behind him.

She sat there feeling like an awkward intruder for several long moments - ate the last bites of her meal, swallowed.

She glanced at the door as the minutes ticked by, and shifted restlessly. Her lunch break would be over soon, and she'd have to return to work.

She hadn't even got anything; though admittedly she wasn't sure what she'd been looking for, except information that she knew was confidential. She didn't mean to pry, she didn't want to - she just...wanted to help. Somehow.

She felt so useless just watching Harry struggle with everything. When they were kids, she'd been able to help a bit, but the older they got the more Harry withdrew.

Her eyes scanned over Riddle's desk, pausing at the sight at the sight of a slim leather-bound sketchbook. She flipped it open idly, curious, and not sure what to do with herself.

It had been that, or go and stalk his bookcases...

She hadn't expected him to be a good drawer, but there was an amazing memory present in the sketches he had. There was a Paris skyline, a grim looking building on a street she didn't recognize, a full blown sketch of Hogwarts from the lake.

Harry.

They were quick sketches on a page, but the detail was there and...why were there drawings of Harry in Riddle's sketchbook? Not that there was anything explicitly wrong with that, but it did seem a bit creepy. To her, at least.

There was nothing...they were innocent enough sketches, nothing dodgy about them, so she didn't know why something was nagging at her.

The next page had those familiar green eyes again, unnervingly broken in the sketch, with a small hint of steel, downcast.

She couldn't help but ridiculously feel like she was intruding onto something, and the next second a hand had snapped heavily over hers, shutting the book.

Hermione's eyes startled up, rearing back. Riddle was standing over her, no expression on his face but something in his gaze which settled uneasily in her stomach and the next second, everything had gone black.

There was so much work to be doing - not a moment's rest, with another day.

Cho Chang. Two Turtle Doves. Symbols of love.

He'd never really dated Cho, though she'd been his first crush.

He remembered what Tom had said so long ago now, however much it had been intended simply to provoke, about Voldemort being in love with him.

Though the intensity of the man's - if he could even be called that, and maybe he had to be called that, or the task of catching him would simply be impossible - emotions bled constantly into his head, blurring like wet paint with his own feelings, he wondered if the other was even capable of love.

Obsession, certainly. Love? He didn't know. Perhaps a very selfish, cruel sort of love, which coveted and abused.

Then again, in Voldemort's thoughts, he probably honestly thought he was 'freeing' Harry from something, and generally acting well.

He didn't know.

He stepped into the holding room they were keeping Dudley in.

He'd talked to Vernon already, if it could be called talking when his Uncle had simply punched him in the face the second he walked in - something cracked and ugly and insane in his eyes.

He'd let the blow hit - maybe feeling like he deserved some penance, as if childhood hadn't always been a repeated apology for his audacity to still be alive.

Dudley was staring at the floor when he arrived - didn't look up even as Harry let the door shut behind him with a dull thud.

His eyes were red and swollen with tears, hammy hands clenched white on his knees and shoulders slumped.

In adulthood, he looked uncannily like his father.

Harry supposed people would say the same about himself though.

His mouth dried around all the things he should say, or could say.

"Are all wizards as powerful as he is?" his cousin asked quietly, nearly startling him. Harry swallowed.

"I would consider him above average, though I don't know who he is."

"Voldemort." It was a statement, more than anything, and Harry didn't know what to do with it - with all the years and the bruises, now that they'd settled in the room, unwilling to be shaken so quickly. His fists curled, flexed.

"Yeah," he said, lately.

"But you could have killed us any time in your childhood. He was in your head then too. You'd talk about him, sometimes."

Harry's eyes widened with surprise.

"What do you mean I talked about him?"

He didn't remember this.

"M-mum told me. Once. When you were away at that school. After fifth year, when you saved me from the Dementors. We had some of your freaks come around then too, trying to explain the situation. Like that Dumblydore bloke. We talked about it, a bit. It's one of the reasons mum always hated you so much, aside from the fact that magic's never really done us any good."

Harry's brow furrowed.

"But what did I say? How old was I?"

"Apparently you were just a little kid. Before five. You'd start...hissing oddly, like you were possessed and talking tongues or something. Mumble his name. Say he was your friend-"

Harry had been distracted now.

"I hissed? What do you mean talking tongues?" he demanded.

"To like, snakes. At the zoo. One of the reasons mum and dad never took you anywhere, according to her, and then as time went on it was easier just crushing the whole thing. I mean, I'm sure there was more to it than that but-"

"-I talked to snakes at the zoo?"

"Yeah. Don't all your kind do weird things like that?" Dudley shuddered - perhaps thinking of all the weird things that would be happening to him.

Harry swallowed, head spinning. That couldn't be possible, unless...
"I-oh my god."

There was no Slytherin in the Potterline. At all. So if it didn't come from them, a hereditary condition and his mum hadn't been unfaithful...

"Oh my fucking god," he repeated, hands going to his hair, eyes wild. Dudley withdrew a little, seeming defensive. "I-I need to go. I-I'm sorry about all of this. And Aunt Petunia. I mean-" it was difficult to think straight.

Was that the hissing he'd heard in second year?

He couldn't breathe.

Voldemort, whoever he was...was a Slytherin Heir.

And there was no time to research with this twelve days thing!

He fled the room.

He needed to talk to Hermione.

And Voldemort.

Tom looked up as Harry practically raced into his office.
He'd been...excited for this session all week, if he was honest, ever since Harry gave his consent to more...alternative methods.

He'd been released from the Ministry holding cells after twenty four hours, with the obvious consensus that he couldn't have done it, and been busy and playing catch up with his clients ever since.

It didn't help that Miss Granger decided to pop over.

Of course, he'd always felt rather possessive over his 'golden ticket victim', as Harry unwittingly referred to himself, but upon actually getting to know the boy as an adult again, that had only grown.

Harry theorized that Voldemort would kill him if he stepped out of the perceived boundaries of their 'relationship', and maybe that was true - in all honesty, he hadn't decided either or. Harry could be perfect, and if he got bored he might kill him anyway, it all depended...

But he found it fascinating to see what Harry was really like, especially compared to the idea and concept he himself had before.

He wondered if Miss Chang was dead yet.

"I need to cancel our session today," was the first thing Harry said, before he could speak. "Things came up. With the Voldemort case. And I still have another eleven potential victims I'm not willing to just watch die."

He was immediately turning out again. Tom's eyes narrowed.

If 12 days of Christmas hadn't led to his consent, he might be rather annoyed with his own plans right now.

But he supposed he could wait.

Still...

"What's happened?" he asked, affecting a look of concern and taking several advanced steps after Harry.

Harry's eyes were still wild from the day before, still gleaming like that inner strength had been shoved out with a steely vengeance.

Harry shook his head distractedly, wired, practically jittering with restlessness.

"I need to talk to him before Cho dies."

Now that was interesting...

"You intend to contact Voldemort? Are you sure that's wise?"

Harry said nothing, but he could practically hear the repeat of Harry's unwillingness not to let more victims suffer. Tom felt a slow smile cross his lips.

Just as well he didn't have to have a session right this second after all.

Though really it was a toss up on which one he would have preferred - a potential deal, as Harry would no doubt angle for, or his plans.

He saw no reason not to have both.
Harry might not be wanting his control and responsibility much longer, and he would be more than happy to step in and take care of that for the boy.

He moved back to his desk, and half an hour later he felt the tickle on his brain as Harry tried to contact him via their connection, offered a response before the boy could.

"*If you kill three of them, I'll spare the rest*."

Part One: 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry's head was spinning, even as he closed the link, feeling the smugness and the relish still clinging to his mind from the other.

Four dead overall, three by his own hand - and eight would be saved.

That was over half! Surely that meant it was his obligation to do this?

Voldemort's sly question if he'd got a taste for murder still rung through his head, bringing bile into his throat...even as the forced emotions spun through his head too. Voldemort's delight at murder had always been one of the most clearest of transfers, splicing with his own nausea, but undeniably the happiest he felt when his own life was just one bullet after another.

He scrubbed a hand over his eyes, breathing harsh.
The choice was the worst - to try and save them all and ignore the deal, with no guarantee of success and just the promise of bloody retribution if he failed, to take the deal and save eight but then have to decide who died.

He suspected he knew who Voldemort *wanted* him to pick, and the Christmas gift the murderer no doubt thought himself as kindly offering.

A chance of revenge, a forcible closure over years of bruises and a black eye that swelled on his face even now.

He could pay the Dursleys back for all the years of suffering.

In Voldemort's depictions, Aunt Marge was torn apart by wild dogs - and surely the serial killer would not be able to pull off such a set up?

He supposed the elegance to the other was in the challenge of pulling all of these crimes off, under all the best security the ministry could offer.

His mind scrambled, and he wanted more than anything to just curl up in a ball.

He wished someone else would make the decision for him, that he could just surrender up the control he clung to so tightly, because at least then it might feel slightly less like his fault.

Why was Voldemort his responsibility? Because he had the debatably bad luck to survive the man? He'd never asked to be the hero.

Currently Tom was the only one keeping the weight of Voldemort from crushing down on him completely, and with Voldemort's previous actions he couldn't help but think of how fragile such an...alliance was. How easily broken and snatched away.

Voldemort had already killed Sirius, and maybe made it perfectly evident that anyone Harry was close to in any capacity was fair game.

He didn't even need to kill off Ron and Hermione, when he had to be aware that Harry knew the threat his very presence could cause.

But it was just so difficult to go it alone. Sometimes, like when he gave Tom his consent, he felt maybe he didn't have to face the monsters alone, but right now he felt like he was drowning in open water with no one else but the hands pulling him under.

Tom tried to understand, maybe came the closest, but it left his stomach rolling that Voldemort understood him best. He knew which buttons to press, which strings to pull.

They were connected. More than he could ever have imagined, if the Parseltongue could be believed.

He just needed to figure out who the Slytherin Heir was.

Maybe he would ask Tom, the man knew everyone's bloody dirty secrets with his job - but he probably couldn't say under client confidentiality, and he was supposed to be a suspect anyway.

Tom and Snape had both been Slytherins though.

He wondered if it was worth just diving into that investigation, hoping that he could catch the bastard before anyone could die either way.

Rather than making that terrible, terrible choice.

But the day was almost over, and, when it was - Cho would be dead, and the longer he waited, the less he saved.

Voldemort had made it pretty damn clear this was a one night deal too; cranking up the pressure until Harry was wound up so tight he felt like the smallest push would just shatter him.

He should have seen this coming. He knew what the other wanted from him after all.
He just felt so tired and sick.

It had been over seventy two hours since he last slept, not wanting to face the confusing shifts of his dreams which did nothing to leave him refreshed.

He swallowed, shuddered.

He could try and trick the deal. Fake deaths. Save them all. Relocate them.

But if it went wrong...god, if it went wrong, he'd as good as murdered all of them.

He clenched his fists. Wished they'd shake. Even now his hands refused to shake, though he felt like he was quivering uncontrollably all over.

Everyone expected him to know what to do, to win, to always be able to fight back because that was his job. Maybe if his hands would shake, they'd be able to see he couldn't do it, and he wouldn't feel so guilty about the thought of an extremely early retirement.

His breathing was ragged with panic. He squeezed his eyes shut. Pretended this was war.
Made his choice.

Tom had almost half been expecting the knock on his door, even if it was past 3am.

Harry was standing in the stark light of his porch, white as sheet, looking like he might pass out or throw up at any second.

His hands were covered with blood, and there was some smudged on his cheek too. He looked like he could be a corpse, he was so pale. It was beautiful.

Tom blinked, entranced for a second, as Harry stared at him helplessly, before snapping into action and grabbing Harry's upper arm to yank him into the house and shut the door behind him.

He kept his relish as contained as he could.
"Tell me what happened," he ordered. Harry just shook his head, a whimper caught somewhere in his throat, eyes blown wide.

He could feel the emotions lapping at him - such terror, and self-loathing, confusion, triumph, resolve and the splintering of it too. It almost overwhelmed him.

For the first time, it felt to him that the positions were reversed. He'd stepped into Harry's mind and crime scene, rather than the other way around.

Harry's eyes were blind, as he stumbled with his movements, hands held away from his body.

He couldn't help but wonder how the boy had done it, to get that much blood on his clothes and self. Not that he particularly minded.

He tugged the other into the bathroom, stripping him off his soaked shirt in a few quick movements, reaching for the belt buckle when Harry didn't protest, gaze distant and somewhere else entirely.

It was only when he was standing shivering in his boxers that Harry seemed to come to himself at all, blinking as if waking from a dream. A nightmare.

Their gazes locked for a few seconds, before Harry's slid away.

"Shower," Tom instructed. "I'll leave some fresh clothes outside the door. Then we'll talk."

"I don't want to talk. Not this time. I just - I just want - need-" Harry didn't finish, swallowed. "You said you'd help me. You promised! You-"

"Shh, shh..." he reached out, grabbing Harry's arms tightly again as the boy's breathing picked up, as he choked and stumbled over the words and air. "I will. I will. You'll tell me what happened, and I'll fix it."

"I thought you didn't fix things and just gave others the tools to fix it themselves?" Harry mumbled. He smiled softly, cupped the other's cheek to nudge his eyes up.

So near broken now.
All it would take now was a push, he could reach out, grab that currently exposed core in his hands - squeeze and twist. He let his attention brush over it instead, like his hands grazed against Harry's bare skin.

"I help my friends. Now shower. Unless you need help getting the blood off your hands? I'll be leaving the door unlocked..."

Harry wasn't throwing up this time. He seemed to have gone beyond that, flittering in and out of a dissociating state. There was absolutely no way, from the perspective of a psychiatrist, that he could

leave the boy alone now. He was too unpredictable on what he'd do.

Now he just got to decide if he wanted to tip him off the edge of reality he was teetering on, or ground him to face his consequences. He felt a glorious rush of power go through him, and something in Harry's eyes flickered. Harry would probably be happier insane.

The boy stared at him for several long moments, as if forgetting to flinch from his eyes, forehead pinched, before he just seemed to sag and turned for the shower.

Harry hadn't been able to do it.

He just - not three of them. Maybe he was a coward, or weak, for not being able to kill to save lives.

He'd be a terrible soldier, but that was still what everyone seemed to expect from him.

He let his Uncle's blood pour down the drain of Tom's gleaming white shower.

He felt too tainted to be in the man's house, with two murders now under his belt, but he hadn't known who else to turn to.

He didn't want to see the disgusted horror on Ron and Hermione's faces. Didn't want to burden them, bring a serial killer to their door.
Killing a criminal copy cat murderer was very different to essentially choosing a victim, carefully disabling the security on the holding room, and...

His chest heaved, retched, but he had nothing to throw up.

His knees felt like they could crumble beneath him.

Even when the water was so hot it burned against his skin, leaving it red and raw, he still didn't feel clean. He stood there until the water ran to ice instead, barely noticing the difference.

He needed to get a grip, but however much he was able to keep his cool during a murder, during work, when it was over and all he had left was what he'd done, it was just so much more difficult.

He didn't want to get a grip if it meant looking in the mirror with the realization he didn't even recognise the man staring back anymore.

He distantly heard a knock on the bathroom door.

"Harry, you've been in there for half an hour. Indicate your still alive and okay, or I'm going to come in."

Harry stared at the door listlessly, unable to even get out a word.

If he opened his mouth, he'd start screaming, and then he had a horrible feeling he wouldn't be able to stop.

He was a psychiatrist's dream date already for experimentation on his messed up mind. If he started screaming they'd lock him up for good. Maybe they'd lock him up already.

He'd got Dudley and Aunt Marge out of there. Faked it, gambled - because if Voldemort found out, then they were all dead and it would be the fault of his own inability to pull through.

He just...he'd looked at Dudley, and his cousin had almost seemed to *know*. Staring back at him, at his bloodied hands.

He hadn't been able to do it.

It wouldn't stop the Aurors sending him to Azkaban.

He was guilty.

It didn't just feel like he'd done it, he actually had.

"I'm fine." It was barely audible. Tom probably didn't even hear. He stepped out, wrapped a towel around himself as the door opened. "I'm fine." He repeated, louder. "I'm fine. I'm fine."

"Okay. I know," Tom said.

"I'm fine," he said, again. Tom looked at him for a moment, and he wanted to cringe, gritted his teeth so another repetition of that worthless lie wouldn't come out of his mouth.

Once he was dressed, the other guided him down to the sitting room, perhaps rightly assuming he wouldn't be sleeping any time soon.

It all felt so awfully familiar to last time.
He wondered if there had been a next time. Last time he'd promised there wouldn't be, now he just didn't know anymore.

He swallowed, wetted his lips, made a futile effort to bring himself back under control.

"I saved them," he said. "That's what matters, isn't it?"
He hated the humiliating edge of desperation in his voice.

"You said you were going to talk with Voldemort," Tom intoned softly.
Harry's eyes squeezed shut, as he let out a shaky exhale.

It was too much. It was just - too much - all too much.

"I feel like I'm becoming him. Slowly. That he's just chipping away from what's me, until there's nothing left and there's nothing to hold onto because what I hold onto is what he's using against me in the first place-I don't-"

Tom just looked at him, perhaps waiting for him to verbalise, but he couldn't.
He couldn't pinpoint when it had happened, though after Petunia's death he'd first become aware of it.

Then, he'd thought it was his power, a weapon and a tool that he could use...

He didn't feel like himself anymore.

Worse, he knew that Voldemort hadn't given him anything new, he'd just hostaged the best parts of him and twisted them into something dark.

His desires to help and save people led to destruction and murder.

His friendships turned into target practice.

Anything good about him was simply being smeared and deformed.

"I feel like something's - gone wrong - in me," he bit out. "Was I just bad at the start that he picked me? I just - it's not getting any better. Whatever you're trying to do, whatever tools you're trying to give me, they're not working! It's just - just getting worse. I'm becoming more like him. The connection is just getting stronger. The last time I stood at his crime scene I couldn't even tell what was me or him anymore!"

His only solace was that maybe it was almost over.
He just needed to track down the line of Slytherin.

Maybe for the rest of the twelve days he'd have some reprieve. Maybe, through some miracle, Voldemort's appetite was satisfied.

Sirius had once told him that everyone had some light and dark inside of them, that having bad things happen to him didn't make him bad.

He wished his Godfather was still around.

The ache had faded over the years, but right now it felt as raw as ever.

He looked at Tom, hatefully.

"Are you just going to sit there in silence and listen to me again?" he spat.

"No," Tom said, quietly. "I'm not. I had a plan for our session today, an...exercise you may call it. Now just hardly seemed the right time to bring it up."

"Show me," he ordered.

It was difficult, because he'd always had to rely on himself, and nobody else. He'd based everything about himself on his own ability to keep doing what was right, on a few moral principles and pushing forwards to survive.

But maybe that was the problem. Maybe Tom had been giving him the tool all along, but his pride and every instinct simply screamed at him that it wasn't an option.

He didn't want to give everything he was up, his independence, and the thought of trusting somebody else to really look after him seemed inconceivable. He'd always looked after himself.

But if Voldemort was working by targeting his footholds...

The Butterflies targeted his emotions, his heart, twisting it with the promises of happiness if he just succumbed, the promise of change and a mission statement.

Twelve Days of Christmas and Crouch targeted his morals, his 'need to play the hero' as Hermione called it. His need to be good so he wasn't Voldemort.

So maybe he had no choice but to grab onto Tom instead, something else, anything outside of his own skin.

He wanted to rely on himself, but his own mind was the bloody problem! It always had been.

His eyes followed Tom numbly as his psychiatrist moved across the sitting room, to a cupboard, watching as he pulled something out and turned.

Harry's mouth dried around the acrid taste of vomit, eyes widening.

Rope.

What the hell?

Chapter End Notes

So, there'll be more explanation on what happened with the deal next time. I guess I'm trying to show the way Harry's mind is jumping around and trying not to focus on him, and how everything feels not quite right and jumping around. Hope I succeeded on that count, and it doesn't just feel like I'm randomly skipping things or leaving them out, because I promise I'm not. You'll also find out what happened to Hermione. And Cho, for that matter. So, um, yeah.

Feeback, is of course, always appreciated :)

Part One: 19

Chapter Notes

> So, I'm actually terrified to post this chapter. Normally I can post them more or less immediately once they're written, but I've been debating this one for hours, so please tell me what you think of how this story is going whilst I go and hide somewhere and try and do something more useful in my life.

Even with everything else going on, Harry's first thought was something entirely inappropriate for a therapy session - unless it was being run by Freud.

His eyes moved over the rope, and, just for a second, he was startled out the fugue of guilt and helplessness he had spiralling into.

His mouth felt stupidly dry.

"...unless you're intending to knot that into a noose I can use to hang myself, I don't see how it's going to help anything," he replied.

Tom shot him a mildly sharp, or at least discerning, look at the comment, offering a tight smile in response, before his expression cleared.

Harry could just imagine him jotting 'potentially suicidal thoughts and tendencies' into a mental file.

"No, that was not my intention. From what I have gathered, one of the problems causing you so much distress is the issue of control," Tom said, taking a step forward. "I intend to temporarily strip that control, and thus any accompanying senses of guilt or responsibility, away from you."

"You want to, what, tie me up or something?" Harry swallowed, shaking his head, trying to figure it out. "I'm pretty sure lack of control isn't my problem." He felt exposed and vulnerable enough already, without his psychiatrist tying him up and whatever he'd been expecting...this wasn't it.

He just wished his head would stop thinking about it. Though he supposed it was better than thinking about Uncle Vernon's vacant eyes glaring up at him.

His fists clenched.

"Then it will teach you to confront the fear and the powerlessness you feel when the normal things you rely on are taken from you, allowing you to build new footholds and foundations if you find yourself in a difficult situation," Tom returned smoothly. "Face your fear."

It all sounded so logical - and yet somehow he'd never equated someone tying him up with logic. His eyes darted over the rope as Tom set it on the coffee table between them. He was trying not to laugh, even as he really didn't find it funny.

"You do know as an Auror I own standard issue handcuffs and why do you even have that much rope in the first place?"

"Yes, but I'd wager you also know how to get out of Ministry standard issue handcuffs, which would rather defeat the purpose," Tom raised his brows.

Harry bit his lip.

Would this actually work? He had no idea how it was even supposed to work! He didn't even know if the whole thought didn't make him want to start having a panic attack.

He wondered if Hermione knew of Doctor Riddle's alternative methods.

"....so you intend to tie me up and...?"

"And?" Tom questioned, before his expression cleared, a small wry smile flitting across his lips that didn't entirely reassure Harry. Though he had to admit the fact that Tom was still talking to him normally, like he hadn't just killed a man, and wasn't on the brink of a mental breakdown, was nice. "Nothing unprofessional or inappropriate, of course. Legal fees and all that..I'd rather not get sued."

Harry snorted, though it was more on the edge of hysterical than amused. He scraped a hand over his face.

He still didn't know how Tom expected all of this to work - it just sounded slightly insane!

"You said you trusted me," Tom reminded quietly. Harry squeezed his eyes shut. He had, hadn't he? He didn't even have any other ideas, he just...wanted to feel better so badly. He couldn't say the thought of even temporarily absolving himself of guilt wasn't tempting.

He swallowed, again, but the wedge still hadn't left his throat.

"Fuck, I can't believe I'm considering this." He ran a hand through his hair, exhaling, wishing his head would feel straight on his shoulders. How could he be expected to make any sort of informed or responsible choice on the matter when he suddenly wasn't even sure if he was still himself?

He still had no idea how this worked. He felt so - so uncertain - about everything - and so tired - and - he squeezed his eyes shut once more, trying to think.

Tom took another step forward.

"If it doesn't make you feel better, there won't be any repeats. Though I should note, I don't tend to offer my more...alternative therapies lightly. If you agree, think carefully first, because you will not be able to back out for the duration of the session once it starts."

"And how long is a 'session'?" Harry blinked, fingers curling tightly in his lap, pressing into each other.

"Perhaps a couple of hours at the most."

"...do you do this with a lot of people or am I special case? Because I don't have a good track record being people's special cases."

"Obviously I cannot give you too many details due to client confidentiality, but yes, I have - the only thing special about your situation in this case is that you're getting the service on discount."

Part of him wondered if there was something Tom wasn't telling him about all of this.

"Well, if you get too excited at least I'll find out very quickly if you're Voldemort," he joked, without humour. He felt like all the stitches keeping him together were unravelling, and maybe this - this mad plan - would help.

At this point, he was willing to try almost anything.

He didn't know. His head was pounding. If Tom was Voldemort the Universe hated him - but he couldn't believe he was. Though Harry wasn't sure how rational his conviction was, compared to how much was based on his desperate need for it not to be Tom.

It wasn't Tom. Tom wouldn't torture himself.

"Good bloody practise for when they send me to Azkaban," he muttered.

"I won't ask again what happened, as it is clear you do not wish to talk about it currently, " the other murmured, studying him carefully.

"Hmm. Yeah. They'd ask you to be a character witness when they convict me. Best I keep my mouth shut."

"Harry, under my legal agreements, the Ministry cannot force me to appear in court and testify, didn't Miss Granger tell you that? I have a lot of very old families under my clientele, I don't know if it will reassure you or not, but I've seen worse than you."

...that was actually the most comforting thing Tom had offered him all night, and he relaxed into the knowledge that maybe he wasn't on Voldemort's level of evil yet, if Tom didn't think he was. Hell knew, it worried him that he needed someone else to define it for him nowadays, because he could no longer tell himself.

How bad could this be? Maybe that wasn't the right attitude to be approaching this with. He waited for Tom to start, only to find the other was still watching him.

"What?" he asked, rubbing his eyes.

"You've yet to give me a fully consenting response."

"Half the time I'm stuck in the head of a mad man and I can't be entirely sure if he isn't messing with me this very second! Any consent you get from me is by definition dubious," he pointed out. Tom merely raised his brows. Harry found himself calming, just a tiny bit, by how...solid Tom was. How unshaken.

Harry turned away, wished he had a glass of whiskey to drain first.

“It’s amazing, what you do,” he murmured.

“Excuse me?”

“You always act....you’re always composed. I’m an Auror, I’m supposed to be...there for everyone, I’m supposed to be the hero who’s brave and not bothered by any of this because the good guys always win.” There was a slightly mocking, self deprecating tone to his voice. “How do...how do you it?” He looked at the other once more. “Do you just not care?”

“I have very good compartmentalization skills,” Tom replied, in a measured tone. “And I’m very good at distancing myself from distressing things.”

An ugly smile crossed Harry’s lips.

“You see us as problems, not people. Damaged little things for you to fix up and add to your collection.” He gave a short, unforgiving laugh.

“It’s your job to care about the people, not mine. If not caring makes me very good at my job and objective enough to give them the solutions a friend would be too soft to offer, then so be it.”

“So this is all clinical.” Harry’s eyes swept over the rope. “You said we were friends. Please...don’t lie. Not right now. The world’s fucked up enough in my head that I can’t - I can’t-” he rubbed his eyes against his temples, felt the foundations wobble dangerously, wanted to burst out crying and hated himself even more for that stupid, childish feeling and burn in his eyes. He choked it down. “I’m fine.”

“You are my friend. You are also my client.”

“And does that affect your professional judgment on me?”

There was a long silence that gave him all the response he needed, but he waited for whatever verbal excuse or honesty Tom would offer either way.

“Yes. Yes it does. If you were not my friend, I would be obligated to have you institutionalized.” The words were blunt, and Harry’s eyes widened with absolute shock as he whipped to face Tom, shoulders stiffening. He took a startled step back, only for Tom to hold up his hands as if placating a wild animal. “As you are my friend, and I have the utmost confidence in my abilities, and am aware that following the book does not always yield to the best results - hence why I wrote and started my own - I see no reason to do that when I’m fully aware of your dislike of such things. I’m your friend. I’m going to help you, and I’m going to stand by you no matter the consequences of your actions today. I-” it was one of those rare moments when Tom faltered again, expression softening. “I know you’d do the same for me.”

Harry exhaled a breath, eyes narrowing slightly, feeling the affection warm him up inside. And god...he just felt so cold. He didn't want to switch back on, when he knew he'd end up on his knees vomiting.

He wanted another shower. To clean his hands again.

He met Tom's eyes and nodded.

"With the full awareness that once this starts I won't be stopping until the session is complete, no matter what you say?"

Harry hesitated.

"Yeah. Even then."
It had to be worth a shot.

Hermione sat on her bed, reading, trying to will away the headache lurking in the back of her head - waiting for an opportunity to sharpen.

Riddle had assured her that everything was okay with Harry at lunch, but she still couldn't shake the nagging feeling in her mind. Harry wasn't...Harry wasn't okay. He very clearly wasn't okay.

She didn't blame Riddle - Harry's was a rather unique case, and probably not exactly easily treatable either. If it even was treatable. Maybe he'd teach him Occlumency, though Snape had tried and failed miserably. But Harry didn't like Snape, and he seemed to like Tom rather too much if the way they'd danced at the Ministry Ball was anything to go by.

She shouldn't judge, if it helped Harry it had to be good, and she supposed attachment to someone who knew your secrets was only natural. But still...she hoped he didn't get hurt out of it, especially if Riddle was forced to refer him.

It was a dangerous game, really, because she'd tried getting Harry help before and he'd never lasted a second with the other mind healers. He said he had no desire to spill his guts for someone who spent every second with him thinking about the book deal they could get for publishing papers on the innermost workings of the mind of the "Boy who Lived."

Tom wasn't just Harry's best chance, by Harry's own reluctance to get involved with psychiatry, he might just be his only chance too.

Her eyes widened when there was a loud thumping on her door, before going down, wrapping her purple dressing gown tighter around her.

It was Ron.

His eyes were wild, hair dishevelled.

"Have you seen Harry? Is he with you?"

"What? No. What's happened? Did - Cho - is she?"

"She's alive."
So why didn't he look more happy?

Her brow furrowed.

"Something's gone wrong," she stated. "What?"

"The Dursleys are dead. There - there is blood all across Vernon's room!"

"They weren't supposed to die today! The cameras-"

"Cut. I don't know if this is Voldemort, or - or-" Ron shook his head. "We need to find Harry. I'm afraid Voldemort might have...got to him."

Hermione transfigured her clothes quickly.
"Have you checked in with Riddle."

"...the psychiatrist? Harry hates therapy, why would he be with Riddle?"

Sometimes, and she didn't mean it horribly, she wondered how the man became an Auror.

It took every effort of Harry's to hold still as he held his hands behind his back, the rough texture of the rope pressing against his wrists. Tom gave his shoulder a reassuring squeeze, looping it around him. The rope pulled at his shoulders until he couldn't even wriggle them, though he had tried tensing so maybe they would be looser when he relaxed.

It didn't work. It wound around his ankles too, under and around his thighs and back over his shoulders, attaching his ankles to his wrists.

Tom was very professional about it, and Harry felt a bit ashamed that with his psychiatrist's hands gliding over his bare torso (increased sense of vulnerability, according to Tom, and Harry couldn't say he disagreed) and grazing over the sensitive soles of his feet other thoughts of other scenarios flittered through his head too in a nauseating combo of good and bad experiences. It was getting difficult to keep balanced.

It didn't help that Tom had settled a blindfold over his eyes once his hands were tied, after the initial agreement - and Harry certainly hadn't remembered that being part of the bloody agreement!

He was forced to rely on touch alone, and, as time went on, forced to trust.
Even if Voldemort wasn't Tom, the what-ifs were spinning wildly through his head and he certainly didn't feel relaxed right then! If anything, he felt utterly on edge.

"Tom, I've changed my mind," he blurted out. The other's hands paused against his skin- taking his pulse. "Untie me."

"No."

"I-I'm not consenting. It is not bloody consent if I change my mind! I don't like this. If somebody walks in right now and attacks me, I can't do a thing!"

"Do you feel like somebody is likely to attack you in my home?" Tom asked calmly, merely tightening knots. "And as I said, once the session has started, I will not allow you to back out. You are out of your comfort zone. That is expected, good even. My therapy would not work if I stopped the second it got difficult."

Easy for Tom to say when he wasn't the one tied up!

His voice was so measured. Harry wanted to snarl at it - and then immediately flinch from the thought and the anger because anger led to violence and was that his or somebody else's? He shuddered.

He'd thought making the deal would give him more control too, and he could feel satisfied that he'd saved Dudley and Marge, faking their deaths. But he didn't feel in control. He felt like he'd just walked straight into what Voldemort wanted from him anyway. His breathing picked up.

"Shh," Tom murmured, soothingly. "Just calm down, Harry. You're fine. Now, open your mouth please so I can gag you."

Harry reared back, shaking his head. Oh no, no. No way. It had to be obvious to the man that he didn't like this! Wasn't this supposed to be done in small baby steps!?

He wondered if Voldemort's victims screamed for him to stop, pleaded for their lives, let out a shudder, and...his hands were shaking. Tom did nothing to force anything into his mouth, however, and he was half terrified the doctor would try - and it was like all of his nightmares come true!

He felt...utterly helpless.
But he also remembered Tom saying he didn't get out of this until the session was complete, and Tom must have warded the ropes or something because he couldn't wriggle free with magic's help either. Though he certainly tried.

Tom had to either be a serial killer, really into BDSM and so practiced with tying people up. Or both.

Then again, he said he went hunting, so he was probably used to hogtying his game.

The thought did absolutely nothing to reassure him.

He let his lips part, wetting them, and it was only then that the wad of material was pressed in with a gentleness he hadn't been expecting, but desperately needed.

"Very good," Tom murmured. "Now, calm your breathing Harry, and your mind. There is nothing you can do right now. You've already tried freeing yourself, and you know you can't."

There was no immediate effect, just Tom's warm hands resting on his hips.

It took a while, but, eventually, simply because Tom was showing no inclination of doing anything, he started to calm. He could almost feel the calm radiating through him like the warmth of Tom's fingers.

“You’re doing great,” Tom said. He could practically picture the smile. “Now, believe it or not, I am actually starting you off relatively easily. You see, what I’m attempting to achieve is something called a subspace. Have you ever heard of it? It’s a term often used in BDSM practises, because the intense reaction caused by what’s going on in BDSM scenes tends to evoke it, and a sympathetic nervous system response which releases natural chemicals into the body. Such as endorphins, for example.”

There was nothing to do but listen carefully.

“Nod if you’re with me so far,” Tom added. Harry nodded after a moment, stomach still lurching with a desperate unease that he couldn’t shake, no matter the simultaneous, wired calm.

The crime scenes were flashing through his head again, and Tom’s hands tightened slightly.

“The increase of chemicals create a trance like state, and in extreme cases all sense of pain temporarily ceases- a sort of natural high. It is this feeling that will allow you the reprieve that you are craving.”

Harry sullenly couldn’t help but think Tom could have explained all of this before. His mind was twitching, and whilst he could agree with the intense part in that he was convinced he was going to throw up and choke with all of the associated imagery, he didn’t see what he was going to get for the good part. The explanation didn’t calm him either, and he shook his head again.

As much as he didn’t want to be in his own head, he didn’t want to be pushed back in his mind so he entered the ‘door’ into Voldemort’s instead.

Tom seemed to utterly ignore the protest. He didn’t know what he’d been expecting, but it wasn’t to be plunged into this so suddenly and only now that he was trapped actually thinking through what he’d agreed to with anything other than blind panic.

“Now, do I have your consent to move onto the next stage?”

The next stage? What the hell was the next stage!? Wasn’t tying him up enough?

At least it wasn’t in a Butterfly position, Tom had to know he wouldn’t be able to stand that. Though he didn’t much like the implications of being stuck on his knees either.

He gave a small moan of protest, shook his head.
“Alright then, tell me when you change your mind.”

He felt Tom’s hands leave him, and his head snapped up, trying to place where the other had gone via footsteps. Was he - was he leaving!? He couldn’t just leave him alone like this, could he?

The images immediately started going through his head faster, now not kept at bay by the sense of calm either. He couldn’t see anything, couldn’t feel anything but the floor beneath him and the ropes nuzzling against his skin, awkwardly resting and shifting around his legs if he struggled against them too much.

How the hell was Tom even supposed to hear him consent or anything if he left the room? He didn’t want to be alone with this - that was even worse! Then there was absolutely no reminder that he was still technically safe.

He nodded his head, just wanted to get through this as fast as possible.
He would not be agreeing a second time, that was for sure.

Tom’s hands returned.

Then there was a knock on the door.

Tom scowled as the door went - and he was actually starting to get sick at all the interruptions, though at least Lucius’ visit during lunch had been marginally interesting.

Harry’s head snapped up at the sound, and he squeezed the other’s shoulder again, feeling that same rush of power when the boy relaxed marginally under the touch.

It took a lot of effort on his behalf to stay under control - more emotionally than physically, because he didn’t actually have any interest in messing with the session via his other hobbies. Right now, at least, this was about treatment, and not actually toying with Harry further.

Despite what most people would believe, he did take his job very seriously most of the time. They were always cured before he killed them, even as Voldemort. Made better.

He wanted to see if this worked, and if it led to a greater dependence...he wasn’t complaining. He was still giving Harry the rest he needed. He wouldn’t say he was growing fond of the boy, but...well, he

admired his spirit.

He wanted to break Harry, yes, but he also wanted to put him back together as a shinier version of himself, with all of his potential fulfilled.

Though he maintained Harry would make an exquisite crime scene, if it came down to that.

“I’ll be right back.”

Harry made a sound of protest, but after simply carding his fingers reassuringly through the other’s hair he left him there.

Weasley. Granger. He didn’t let his eyes narrow.

“Can I help you?” he asked, making a show of yawning, a little bleary eyed, with a pointed glance at the clock. Granger did at least look a little bad about waking him at past four in the morning.

“Is Harry with you?” the redhead asked bluntly. He considered his options for a moment, tempted to lie but well aware of how easily that could cause problems later.

“Yes. He’s fine. Sleeping, in fact. Has something happened?”

“His relatives are dead, we thought - has he been with you all night?”

“...is my client in trouble, Auror Weasley?” Tom raised his brows. “Because if he is, I do not believe I should be discussing anything about him without my lawyers present, or without questioning him first myself on the matter.”

“Can we just see him?” Hermione bit out. Tom shook his head.

“He’s sleeping. Come back in the morning. I’m sure you’re aware of how rare it is to get him to sleep, and I cannot in good conscience allow you to interfere with that. It is vital to his treatment and health.”

“Well, yes, of course but-”

“Was there anything else?” He gave a polite, but firmly dismissive smile. “He is still capable of answering your questions in the morning, and I’m sure you agree that he is well deserving of being allowed to sleep for one night without hearing his family are dead. Yes?”

Weasley looked utterly frustrated, glaring at him.
“We could get a warrant.”

“Ron!” Granger exclaimed, wide-eyed.

Tom’s eyes narrowed.
“I do hope you’re not trying to threaten me to get to my client. I’d hate to get involved in such an unnecessary, expensive, court case with you.”

Weasley flushed at the insinuation of his family’s wealth or lack thereof, and the knowledge that even now he couldn’t afford such a thing.

“We’ll be back in the morning,” Hermione said, though he doubted she’d be so compliant if she had the full stock of her memories.

“Quite. Goodnight.”

He shut the door, let his eyes darken for a moment, itching to murder them - the Weasley boy in particular for his unspeakable rudeness. His lips thinned, and he took a moment to shake the thoughts before returning to the living room.

Harry was about as pale as he had been when he first arrived, and he swept over, tapping the boy’s shoulder lightly to indicate that he was back, watching him twitch a little, starting to form a cold sweat with the things no doubt circling his head.

He’d banked on this reaction, even. It was quite fascinating. His hand reached out of its own accord, catching hold of Harry’s chin and tilting his head up to examine him. Pity he had to be blindfolded for this particular session. The boy mumbled something, but it was too muffled to be understood.

He couldn’t do this like he would really want to, not professionally, so he’d had to come up with another solution to get to the point he wanted Harry at. Harry would have to do most of the work himself. Still.

Harry was already half dissociated from the things he’d done earlier today, teetering on the edges of his control, detaching slowly from a reality he didn’t want to face.

He'd always wondered how far such things could be pushed, whether psychosis could be conditioned into a person, without the use of drugs.

Maybe he'd write a post-mortem paper on it.
He wondered how much he could get away before the partial suspicions Harry already had, but pushed back, simply splintered under the pressure.

The best option, which he was personally aiming for, was for Harry to be at such a level of dependence when he inevitably discovered Voldemort's identity, that he kept quiet anyway. Joined him instead.

Plans had never been made with only half of him in mind, after all - why use one side of him, when he could cage Harry in between both of his personas?

Still, for now, he was actually rather proud of Harry's murders, so he would reward him with the rest he needed. He cast the spell silently, and waited.

This was hardly a one session quick fix after all.

Part One: 20

Tom watched as Harry's whole body seemed to jolt and arch with surprise for a second, head snapping up to look in his direction, even if he couldn't actually see him.

He made a muffled noise, and Tom felt a small smirk cross his lips.

The psychological effect he was after required an intense, but balanced measure of pain and pleasure to take effect. There were numerous ways he could go about it, but this seemed the easiest considering Harry already had the basis for it in his own mind.

It was obvious that Harry was freaking out the second his hands were bound, and even through his strong Occlumency Shields he couldn't help but catch the fragments of his own crime scenes, distorted.

He wetted his lips; kept a careful track of Harry's mind and processes easily. Harry wasn't in a state to recognize if someone was brushing the back of his mind or not, when he could barely think straight and in the aftermath of murder was already so confused about his own identity.

This exercise was merely taking that further, and, after a while, as Harry's thoughts seemed to crescendo with the juxtaposition of the pleasure simulated by the spell, he just...detached.

The stress lines marking his face faded as he simply stopped computing his own thoughts and anything going on around him, buzzing like white noise against Tom's own mind.

He lunged forwards in a split second to keep Harry upright, one hand firmly holding his shoulder so he didn't strain himself too much, the other brushing the hair back from his face.

It wasn't the most involved in the scene he could have been - and it would have been so easy to take advantage and involve himself right now - but he refrained, just watching as Harry occasionally twitched, seeming rather lost to himself seeing as Tom was doing nothing to focus him.

He kept him like that for maybe half an hour, before slowly shifting to remove the gag first, letting the material slip out and tossing it aside for now as he started to wind him down again.

"Thirsty?" it was the first words he'd offered in quite some time, and he wasn't sure if Harry was even coherent enough to give him an answer. When he didn't receive one - he went to get a glass of water anyway, nudging it against Harry's lip.

After a moment, the boy drank blindly, and he had to keep tugging the water back a bit so he wouldn't choke on how fast he was drinking. He let his fingers stroke through the other's hair, pushing back the fringe and revealing that famous lightning bolt scar, before setting the glass aside and dropping his hand.

Next, he undid the blindfold, letting the soft material.

Harry's eyes immediately focused on him from the glaze, head tilting a little to one side. There was an intentness there, the same that there always was, but it was different. None of the normal wariness

was there, the suspicions and the calculations and analysis of everyone around him and especially those who had anything to do with his mind.

It was entrancing, to see Harry look so drugged on Tom, on their memories.
He offered him a small smile, let his fingers glide to untie the knots, letting the ropes fall to the ground.

Harry seemed to completely sag, as the stimuli for his negative experiences was removed, and after a few seconds, he ended the spell too.

The young man blinked several times, sluggishly, shoulders relaxed now, even if his breathing was still a little harsh.

"Come on," he murmured, pulling Harry up, watching as he stumbled a tiny bit with pins and needles. "Let's get you to bed. You're no doubt exhausted."

He personally judged the session a success, however temporary a success it was.

Not having slept for days probably, Harry looked like he could just pass out on the spot now, at the limit of his endurance, so he scooped him up easily.

When he'd first met Harry, he was rather stocky despite his small stature, but he'd since grown a lot thinner. It was probably rather concerning that he had the weight of a teenager, over a fully grown man.

Tom himself was hardly hulking, he was tall and slim, but he was wiry. He had to have some strength to be able to carry out his extracurriculars, even with the aid of magic. Strong and fast.

And his diet was excellent.
Harry looked and weighed like he would forget to eat if someone didn't remind him.

The boy's eyes flickered with confusion, but Tom was already dumping him on the bed he'd stayed on last time, peeling his socks off with quick efficient movements.

"Go to sleep," he instructed. "I'll stay here until you do."

Harry stared at him for a moment, looking younger than ever, expression more open and soft than he'd ever seen it. No weapons or shields drawn for once.

"You're a really weird psychiatrist," the other mumbled, before just closing his eyes whilst his mind was still calm, tired and lulled, having not yet worked itself into a frenzy of guilt and responsibility and violence again, just floating down from the heights of incoherence he'd drifted off to earlier.

Tom watched as his breathing slowly evened out, in an oblivion of unconsciousness for once, rather than a writhing mess of nightmares.

The soft expression faded from his own eyes, going blank, as he tucked the boy in, letting his hand pause on the pulse thudding in Harry's neck. So many years ago, he would never have expected it to come to do this. But so many things had changed since then, some of which he didn't even understand.

But they were connected, and he would hold onto that for as long as it was possible.

With Harry so compliant and relaxed next to him, he could almost pretend for a second that they lived a different life entirely, that they were the happy if unconventional couple that maybe some part of Harry's mind was hoping for.

He let his fingers caress the side of Harry's cheek, the pad of his thumb dragging over Harry's lip. He couldn't help but wonder what they'd taste like.

He leaned down, only to catch himself, let his hand rest over the steadily fluttering pulse point again with a sigh instead.

No. Not like this.

Harry wasn't for his table, though he was sure his heart would be quite the delicacy, and he could taste him in other ways if he was sure of his own control over the matter. It mattered not.

He was getting distracted. Harry wasn't awake for any of this to have any value on their game, no manipulation. Still he hovered, watched for a moment - could count on one hand the number of times he'd seen the boy looked this peaceful. It was an indulgence, almost, on his behalf, like white chocolate, too sweet to be had at all times and only balanced by the more favoured rich bitterness of dark things.

He was a monster for what he'd done to this man.
If he had any remorse to offer, he would have turned himself in now for this unforgivable crime, even if he didn't care for the others.

But...as it was, he simply straightened and moved to turn out the light before he did something stupid. Paused, glanced back, before just shaking his head and shutting the door behind him.

Humans were predatory by nature, he just became the best of them.

It was the most restful night of sleep Harry had in awhile, and he was grateful, he just...he didn't think he'd be up for a repeat experience.

It numbed his mind and gave him the reprieve he desperately needed, but to the extent that he couldn't think of anything at all, exposed by a raw nerve, forced to place his trust completely and utterly in Tom, barely able to function.

He hadn't been able to focus on his surroundings, or even the spinning thoughts behind his unease for being restrained so firmly, it was all muffled to stimulus and sensation and all too much of both.

Tom was already in the kitchen when he woke up, and he blinked.
"Do you ever sleep?" he asked, feeling a bit awkward after all of the previous night's events. Not that anything had happened, but...well…he could feel heat on the back of his neck.

He wondered if Tom was the type to tie people up outside of therapy sessions too, then cursed himself for the thought. He was the man's patient, friend if he had to be anything more, and with far bigger concerns than the romantic status of his doctor.

"On a sunday," Riddle murmured, with a small teasing smile. For a second, he was convinced the other knew what he was thinking, and slid his gaze away. He snorted instead, ran a hand through his hair.

The other was already dressed in another expensive suit, tailored to crisp lines for his form, and gestured at the coffee pot. "Some Aurors were looking for you, earlier, by the way," Tom said. "Your friend Ron was among them."

And everything crashed back on him.

Dursleys. Voldemort. Nightmares. Things less innocent to preoccupy himself with. But it seemed more...not tolerable, but manageable this time. Less of a mess, with even just a small break and some sleep to be able to compose his barriers once more.

He let out a shaky breath, nodding his head, wanted to say thank you but couldn't get the words out, thoughts already twisting down other avenues.

Surely he'd feel it if Voldemort knew he'd lied? He'd have been sucked into his eyes to watch him murder the remaining Dursleys, and everyone else. He'd managed to save them, on his own, without just going along with the plan! That had to count for something.

He knew what this was about though. Gave as much of a smile as he could manage, which was really more the imitation of a grimace.

He poured himself a cup of Tom's freshly ground coffee, and headed out the door.

Tom was acting like it was the same as any of his other sessions. Maybe it was. Maybe Harry was just overthinking it, and the glide of his psychiatrist's fingers across his sensitized skin.

Maybe it didn't matter when he had a serial killer to catch and a Slytherin Heir to research.

He slammed the door shut behind him.

"Miss Chang didn't die last night," Scrimgeour stated, pacing up and down in front of him in his office. Harry kept his expression forward, blank, hands loose in his lap.

"Is that a bad thing, sir?" he raised his brows. "Maybe he couldn't get to her."

"Your relatives are also dead on the same night," his boss said, in clipped tones.

"Are you accusing me of something?" Harry bit out, fists clenching.

"Do I need to be?" Scrimgeour replied flatly. Harry sagged, rubbing his eyes. It was like Crouch all over again, but so much worse. Whilst he didn't want a repeat of that session, he was pretty sure he would have been a babbling wreck if he'd been trying to have this conversation the night before.

"I made a deal with Voldemort."

"I gathered as much. Did you kill them?"

Harry didn't know what to say - on one part, he should tell the truth and say 'no', because it was less likely to end up in Azkaban. On the other hand, Voldemort had an unnerving habit of wheedling out information he shouldn't know, so for the sake of people's lives he should say 'yes', or nothing at all.

Scrimgeour...how could he trust the man when all he could see when he looked at him was his Aunt screaming to death in flames? Of course, if anyone understood involuntary murder, it was him, but…

Secrets were best kept carefully. Especially secrets as dangerous as these.

His boss frowned at his lack of answer, perhaps taking it for a 'yes'. He was obviously wrestling with what to do, and rubbed his temples, nostrils flaring.

"I should fire you."

Harry snorted at the cold words, biting out a harsh laugh.
"You won't fire me. Not until Voldemort is caught and I become expendable."

"I would fire if you became more a liability than a help," Scrimgeour said quietly. "I'd have no choice if you were truly a danger to yourself and those around you. Are you?"

"Isn't Doctor Riddle supposed to inform you on our meetings and tell you the second I am incapable of working in the field?"

"Doctor Riddle was not my first choice of psychiatrist for involvement within you, and the Voldemort case. Healer Smethwyck was my personal recommendation, however your friend Miss Granger got involved and reached out to Riddle."

Harry's brow furrowed slightly, nose wrinkling.

He was glad he got Riddle instead of Smethwyck. He hated Smethwyck, the obnoxious man had been one of the head healers at St Mungo's, and now ran a Psychiatrist Hospital for the criminally insane after Hermione started campaigning against the immorality of sending even dark wizards to the Dementors.

The man had been trying to pick at his brain to write a paper on it from the first time Harry met him. He definitely didn't want him fumbling around his mind, and experimented, and generally having him trapped as a lab rat.

It was one the many reasons he had such a fear of getting institutionalized. He suddenly couldn't help but feel a fresh burst of gratitude towards Tom for not just treating him like a broken toy, some animal in the zoo to be stared at, barely human. And Hermione, for ensuring she didn't end up with Smethwyck.

His jaw tightened.

"It's my therapy, I get to choose who I have it with, even if the Ministry decreed it was compulsory I take some so I could continue being their Voldemort radar," he said flatly.

Scrimgeour stared at him, eyes narrowing slightly.

"Mr Potter," he began, gruffly, "Harry -"

"Save it. I want Voldemort caught as much as you do - actually, I'm pretty sure I want him caught more. You can expect my resignation from the Ministry and the Auror office after that. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have work to do. If you're concerned about my mental health, take it up with Riddle further."

He raised his brows, challengingly - knew his boss wouldn't. Rufus was a good man, somewhere inside Harry knew that, but he cared more for catching his killers and the good of the nation, than of the individual sacrifice involved.

He'd think it was Harry's obligation to be used by the Ministry, whilst his heart still beat to be able to do so. He'd never jeopardize the investigation, even if he suspected - hell knew - that Harry was breaking in the process.

He'd sat and watched long enough already, and only raised the therapist issue so Harry would last long enough to get the job done.

"Considering Mr Riddle is, by your own words and actions in bringing him in, a suspect in this case," Scrimgeour said, tightly. "It wouldn't be a far stretch to see you removed onto the care of Healer Smethwyck for your own safety."

Harry couldn't believe this.

"Are you threatening me, sir?" he bit out coldly.

"I'm merely looking out for the health of one of my top agents," Scrimgeour said. "You just killed three people. Do you not find that evidence concerning? Three innocent people? That would be enough to warrant a one way ticket to Azkaban in most circumstances."

Harry's eyes narrowed. Sometimes he wondered if they were going out of their way to shove him at Voldemort, because the devil knew this would be easier and he'd have a better chance at 'winning' if he didn't actually care about the casualties and saving lives.

"You just killed my Aunt," he spat. "Do you not find that concerning?" I saved your life with this deal, you have absolutely no right to judge me for what I've done or haven't done!"

Scrimgeour's eyes remained fixed on him, and the man's jaw clenched, before he nodded curtly and stood up. Harry knew it wasn't this easy, that it wasn't over and for god's sake he didn't need this right now. He really didn't.

The man strode out without a backwards glance.

Harry turned to a book on Wizarding Genealogy.

Part One: 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry had been called into a ‘meeting’ with his superiors before it was even five O clock. He also knew perfectly well what it was about, and he’d always thought that knowledge and ability to plan his words would calm him down.

It didn’t.

His stomach was churning just as much as it was every time he was called into the Head Offices of the Magical Law Enforcement Department.

He had better bloody things to be doing, like trying to identify which old pureblood line was the one linked with Slytherin.

He sort of suspected the Malfoys, but nobody trusted the creeps really, not completely, and it made no sense for a Malfoy to be Voldemort.

Scrimgeour, Thicknesse and Bones were all sitting waiting for him, with grave faces.

Harry had a really bad feeling in his stomach. His fists clenched at his sides, before his fingers flexed once and went still.

“Please,” Madame Bones murmured softly. “Take a seat Mr Potter.”

Harry dropped into the chair in front of the desk, eyeing all three of them warily. He refused to be the one to start first, to start scrambling over his words and excuses when he didn’t really have any to give.

They exchanged looks with each other.

“Mr Scrimgeour has filled us in on the going ons in your department last night. I’m sorry for your loss,” Bones said. Harry offered her a tight smile, inclining his head in acknowledgement of the condolences.

“Of course, unless Lord Voldemort, as he calls himself, has a magical ability to get past our security personally, and turn off the cameras the conditions of their deaths are highly suspect,” Thicknesse stated coldly. “Especially as from what we have gathered, he is not in the habit of leaving his chosen victims alive and untouched. And yet….if one considers recent developments, we have people dying in the wrong order.”

“I don’t think it would be such a stretch to imagine you would go to some lengths to try and protect those you love,” Bones said, more sympathetically now. “Scrimgeour mentioned you made a deal - unauthorized by your office or any official personal - with this killer?”

Harry could practically feel Thicknesse’s eyes citing regulation at him. He wasn’t in any position where he was allowed to make unauthorized deals, especially not with wanted criminals.

He hesitated.

“Yes, I made a deal. No more of the twelve will die.”

“Yes and you just killed your remaining family!” Scrimgeour snapped, seemingly losing patience.

“You understand that you should, under the law, be escorted immediately to Azkaban prison? Though your superiors have cited that it would perhaps be better for you to instead refer to the care of Healer Smethwyck. This case has obviously been...trying for you,” Bones said calmly.

Harry’s eyes flashed hotly, and he could feel a cruel rage boiling in the pit of his belly which frightened him because this time he knew full well it was own. He felt like some great monstrous snake wanted to rear out of him, to strike out because they didn’t understand and perhaps didn’t even care to.

They pretended to understand what he was going through, but they couldn’t possibly know! At the end of the day, they could tuck their paperwork in a draw and go home to their families, with only slightly more concern than anyone else in the world.

That wasn’t an option for him. He was never safe. Not in waking, not in dreaming, not alone and not in company. It was always there in the back of his head, the insidious of Voldemort, making him feel like he was something disgusted to be around.

No one should ever have to be so scared of themselves and their own capabilities as he was. He’d placed cameras in his room before, just to check he didn’t murder someone in his sleep!

He swallowed bile. Considered holding his silence - couldn't bear the thought of Azkaban, or the Institution. He couldn't say the fate seemed entirely different in his mind.

"I didn't kill them," he said, only lying a little bit. He'd killed his uncle. It felt like poison on his tongue. "It was a trick. I relocated them. Couldn't bear more people dying. I faked the scene."

They studied him closely.
"You faked it?" Bones expression was neutral, giving no clue as to whether she believed him or not. "And why are you only changing your story now?"

"I'm not changing my story. I told Scrimgeour I made a deal, and said nothing when he asked if I killed them." He sent his boss an icy look. "It's not my fault he is so ready to believe that I am the man I'm hunting."

"Where did you relocate them?" Thicknesse questioned.

"I won't be sharing that information. Given previous incidents on the Voldemort case, and his knowledge base, it is better to keep my secrets to myself. The only reason I'm even telling you this is because you'd have me condemned for murder if I didn't," he spat. "Unless you wish to broaden the chances of eight people getting horribly murdered? Including yourself?" he added, looking at Scrimgeour.

The man stared back at him, lips thin, before dropping his gaze.

There was a silent as they seemed to confer with each other, before Thicknesse leaned forward.

Tom Riddle wasn't in the habit of being concerned; he either didn't care, or everything was going flawlessly to his plans, or would without much hassle and alteration.

But Harry hadn't turned up to his therapy session.
Of course, the stupid boy was probably working late and had forgotten again - and the only thing that made him feel less like stabbing Harry for being rude enough to forget about him, was the knowledge that he was his own competition for Harry's time and attention.

Harry worked late for being immersed in Voldemort, so really he should be flattered.
Still, as thrilling and satisfying as being in the centre of Harry's thoughts was, he would have much rather have the boy close now that he'd got a taste for more personal interactions between them.

Before he became Potter's psychiatrist, he would have been fine just watching on the sidelines, twitching strings and knowing the other was desperately struggling with himself, and trying to find him.

Now, however, when he knew what he could had...well, they always said with addiction's that once an appetite for something was whetted, life shifted around it.

He hadn't realized the extent of what he was missing for.
He'd been happy to watch Harry squirm his way through the puzzles he gave him, wrapping him up in a cocoon of his own terror, doubt and wicked delights.

In some way, Harry was still strung up in that cocoon now, whether he was aware of it or not, groping in the dark for a way out.

The difference was that he wanted to see the details form more closely now, to trace his fingers over every quivering muscles and breathe in the scents of Harry's confusion and desperate need for something to hold onto.

He wanted to see what sort of butterfly Harry turned out to be on his own, to watch as he flew - knowing that he himself had created something so perfect. On the other hand, butterflies were delicate things, and rarely saw their own beauty and wings until someone had shredded them off again, and Tom couldn't bear to see Harry bloom only to wither before he could relish the sight.

In some way, it would be better to just grab hold of him, cradle him in his own hands to ensure no harm came to him, and pin him down to the corkboard to appreciate him forever. To keep him forever.

The thing about wings, was the possibility of flying away.
Harry was flighty enough already.

Harry was just working late, wasn't he? Tom hated to think their last session had caused Harry to bolt away from him skittishly. It was nothing to be ashamed of. He'd looked lovely.

Shame he couldn't tell him that, so explicitly

Still, his eyes narrowed and his fingers twitched in agitation where he was once again drawing to pass the time. That, and in an effort to be in a more professional state of mind by the time Harry returned, and not so distracted by memories of Harry's writhing form tied up in ropes as he struggled to manage the pleasure spell, and the trauma screaming through his head.

Lips pulled apart by the gag, leaving it in a state of permanent dryness which had him swallowing every minute or so. How Tom had wanted to reach out and run his fingers along the smooth, exposed line of Harry's throat, to press his lips against his pulse and devour his life just as much as he could make a masterpiece out of death.

He would have loved to do it the unprofessional way.
He'd work on getting Harry that way once he'd accepted Voldemort. Or before, if it came up, but more so after.

And to punish Harry for keeping him waiting this long, for that matter. It was rude. Tom did actually have high demands for his time and efforts, and the boy should be more appreciative of how lucky he was.

He was wrenching the door open when he nearly walked into the patient in question.

And...Smethwyck.

He could admit he hadn't had very many dealings with the head of the London Wizarding Hospital for the Criminally insane. He was a watery looking man man, with a smarmy, simperingly pleasant sort of face and a weak jaw.

One look at the expression on Harry's face told him far too much, but the other healer was beaming at him with a glint in his pale eyes, reaching out to shake his hand.

"Healer Riddle, isn't it? We met at a Mind Arts and healing function in Cambridge?" the man offered.

He shook firmly, expression immediately under control, giving a terse smile.
"I prefer Doctor Riddle, not healer. But yes, I believe so. To what do I owe the...pleasure?"
He gave Harry a slightly questioning flick of his eyes, and his client scowled, crossing his arms. He looked like an unruly child more than anything.

“Scrimgeour has decided that apparently I’m crazy enough for two psychiatrists, and that seeing as I identified you as fitting the criteria as a suspect you two should tag team me on the coach.”

Harry’s voice was too light, and Tom savoured the rather noticeable edge of danger behind it. Unruly child aside, that was the Auror coming through.

Harry had pulled himself together some, at least externally, since he last saw him. Though he was still avoiding eyes.

Tom felt a surge of possessiveness immediately explode in his chest, and it was only years of masks that had his face remaining blank and his posture composed. He noticed Harry’s eyes flicker to him, confused, and could have swore. He immediately clamped down on the emotion, lest he was projecting it, settling a hand on Harry’s back to guide him into the house.

“A wise precaution, though unnecessary. Why, if I was Voldemort, I highly doubt I could satiate myself on a couple of hours of sessions a week alone. I would never have let him go,” he gave a small chuckle, before turning business like. “Of course, I will require you to sign a confidentiality agreement.”

“Do you have your patients gagged too?” Smethwyck returned, clearly trying to sound clever. “You make it sound like you have something to hide.”

He would have been irritated by the response, except Harry’s eyes widened comically and he flushed a rather pleasing red that Tom had never seen on his face before.

He gave Smethwyck a smile.

“A magician never reveals his tricks, and I’m afraid my methods would do little good for those not trained in them. That, and as you are not, I believe, yet in any binding contract with my client, it would work as some insurance to his confidentiality too, however one would wish to abstract information outside of a session.”

Smethwyck’s expression soured at the realisation he might not be able to get anything out of this. Tom felt a vindictive satisfaction grow in him once more.

Whilst he’d never really had much interaction with the man, the healer’s obsession with documenting the minds around the Voldemort case was hardly unknown. He was sure, if the fool knew who he was in a room with, he would have been taking notes.

He gave his ‘colleague’ another pleasant smile, and let his hand drop as Harry stepped away from him.

Everything about the boy's posture was screaming hostility now, at this situation. He was reminded, again, of Harry's initial dislike for psychiatrists and mind healers.

He wanted Harry back for his own again. He disliked sharing.
This situation would need going over, so he could get the exact details of what had happened.

"Please, come through the office…"

Chapter End Notes

Not the most interesting of chapters, but maybe it will reassure you that we're getting to the good stuff ;)

I was going to dedicate this chapter to Guest710/Little-Frog for her beautiful fan art (/ / little- - frog. devi ant art art/ Beautiful-Crime-Scene-39628806) but this chapter didn't seem worthy of that. Still, check it out! :D You shall hence get a dedication on a more...fitting chapter.

Thank you for the reviews guys! Harry's getting close now isn't he? *wicked grin*

Part One: 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Times like these, reminded Harry why he'd hated having a psychiatrist so much in the first place.

He sat stiffly on the sofa, not looking at either of the other two men - though his mind kept spinning over that strange feeling of possession. For a second, he was sure he'd felt it coming from Riddle which was...ominous for the implications. But the man's expression hadn't even changed, so maybe he was mistaken.

Maybe he'd just been hopefully projecting his own feelings, maybe he wanted Riddle to tell Smethwyck to get the hell out of his office and away from his patient.

The two watched him expectantly, though he couldn't help but notice Tom wasn't acting like he normally would with a session.

Whoever's that feeling had been, even if he wasn't a murderous serial killer, no one would be happy having their field of expertise intruded in as if they were incompetent.

"You know," he murmured, to Smethwyck "if Doctor Riddle really was Voldemort, I would have thought you'd be more hesitant in getting so close. If I was Voldemort, and I thought someone was poaching my victim of choice, I'd probably murder them very slowly and gruesomely."

He got some vindictive satisfaction from the sudden sick pastiness of the healer's face, and gave him an innocent smile.

"Do you consider yourself to be his victim, Harry?" Smethwyck returned, after a moment. Harry's lips thinned.

"Do you consider me to be his victim, Healer Smethwyck? And I would prefer to be addressed as Auror Potter."

He stared at the other, hard. Smethwyck shifted, giving a long suffering sigh.

"We are trying to help you. We can't do that if you don't let us."

"Who's we?" Harry gave a sharp smile. "You and your publisher?"

There was a moment of silence, and it said something quite strongly about Tom's feelings on this whole thing, that he wasn't chastising him for being rude.

"You have an extraordinary mind, Harry," Smethwyck started, patiently, hands folding in his lap.

"Voldemort certainly thinks so."

Smethwyck shot him a look at the interruption, and Harry had to clamp down on the urge to give a rather nasty grin, some part of him appalled by his own behaviour.

"-As I said," Smethwyck said tightly, "you have an extraordinary mind, one that could revolutionize modern psychiatry and help a lot of people. Most minds are far more likely to lack empathy and the ability to understand other people's view, rather than the almost pure empathy you seem to have with Voldemort."

"So you're saying I'm a freak?" Harry raised his brows. He saw a well concealed flare of irritation in the other's eyes.

"I am merely trying to signify the benefits of studying you on our understanding of the mind and human psychology," Smethwyck said, neutrally.

"Yeah, well I have no interest being studied," Harry snapped. "By either of you. Or anyone else, for that matter." Smethwyck's mouth opened to respond.

"I do believe we are here to help my client, not pressure him into psychological experimentation," Tom said mildly. "It would be most unprofessional to take advantage of that, do you not think?"

Smethwyck's jaw clenched, before he gave a smile. Harry's eyes met Tom briefly, and the other's lips curled up just slightly, before his face was blank again.

"I would happily help him if he would only talk to us," Smethwyck began.

"I've never had any issue communicating with Harry," Tom said. "It normally starts by addressing him, and letting him dictate the conversation as this is in, fact, his time."

Maybe Harry should be annoyed to be used as a weapon and barb between the two colleagues, but right now, it was more amusing than anything else. Tom probably knew just as well as he did that he

had absolutely no intention of saying anything real with Smethwyck around, confidentiality agreements or not.

He didn't want the man crawling through his head with all of the finesse of a beached whale.

That, and it really did bug him when people talked about him as if he wasn't in the room, and was merely an interesting object, or problem, to be solved.

At least Tom had the decency to be subtle about it.

Smethwyck watched him quietly.
"Mr Potter," he started, carefully using a less chummy form of address this time. "The Ministry has asked me to help evaluate your fitness for field work, given recent developments. Surely it is better for you to have more than one influence to choose from?"

"Yeah, see, that's the thing," Harry mused. "I don't want anyone influencing my mind. I had no desire to seek out psychiatric help."

"*Had*?" Smethwyck immediately snatched up on the past tense, and Harry could have cursed himself. He went silent, crossing his arms, utterly uncomfortable.

He refused to say another word, staring at the ceiling, until the man left over an hour later.

Tom returned to the living room after shutting the door behind that infernal healer.
Sometimes he wondered how such a man became in charge of a psychiatric hospital, because he'd been prodding at Harry with all the discretion and insight of an ogre with a blunt stick.

It was only then that Harry's gaze even shifted away from the patch of ceiling or wall he'd been consistently examining for the last hour.

Tom immediately moved over to his cupboards, taking out some glasses and a bottle of wine, holding it up with a raised eyebrow. Harry nodded, sagging a little, and he soon handed one of the glasses over.

“I bloody well hate that man,” the boy muttered.

“I did notice a certain hostility in the room,” Tom allowed. Harry was silent, merely sipping his wine, slowly relaxing again, at least somewhat.

“How did you get into psychiatry? Was it always something you wanted to do, or-?”

“Initially,” Tom replied, “I wished to go into law, actually. Rather like your friend Miss Granger.” It wasn’t entirely a lie - he’d certainly wished to change the world, though he’d been more on the Dark Lord end of the spectrum than a barrister.

Harry stared at him.
“What changed your mind?”

“Consideration of society leads very quickly to a consideration of the nature of people who make it up,” he replied, carefully. “I find the human mind fascinating. It’s such a complex, delicate thing, prone to so many different variables, and utterly essential to everything else. There is a...tremendous amount of power in the psychological, as I’m sure you’re aware of.”

He surprised even himself with his level of honesty on the matter. Of course, some things remained omitted, they had to be - but there was more truth than most would accredit him with.

“They say people become psychiatrists in an effort to diagnose themselves,” Harry said quietly - and it wasn’t the first time the boy had made such a comment. He was more perspective than most gave him credit for too, even without the aid of a mental connection.

“I’m sure some do.” But he didn’t think that could entirely be said for him. He wanted to understand, yes - he wanted to understand the minds and emotions of humanity, which he’d always felt so separate from, condemned as a child for not fitting with.

Maybe he just liked seeing the damage.

Harry was watching him again, head tilted slightly to one side.

Once upon a time, back at the beginning, Harry would have scarpered and left the second his session was over. It had been a slow shift since then.

“You seem more...grounded, today,” he noted, changing the topic.

“Yes.” There was a hint of flush on Harry’s cheeks. “It turned out your...alternative therapy session was actually quite effective. If you lose your job as a psychiatrist, you can run a professional BDSM club instead.” The other blinked once he seemed to realize what he just said. “I mean-” his gaze darted away again.

Tom could never quite decide if Harry was bold or not, on hand, the dropping of eyes so frequently was both submissive to him and evasive, but on the other...his questions certainly weren’t shy. He suspected Harry didn’t drop his gaze to show his deference, he dropped them because he’d grown wary of what he’d see if he looked too closely. Or, in this case, embarrassment.

He hid behind his glasses, his fringe, and whatever sarcastic comments he could come up with.

“It’s fine,” Tom said, rather amused actually by this particular slip. “I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Harry rubbed the back of his head. It was strange, Tom could still remember a time when the boy was less awkward than this, years before Harry had ever formally met him - more at ease with himself and thus everyone else too.

Although, Harry remained utterly confident of himself in his field of work, which was something. Good. It would be beyond irritating if none of that power and potential shone through. The boy would probably already be dead, without that.

It was almost a shame that he had to break Harry first, before he could truly fix him outside of societal constraints. If he didn’t break him, he’d forever be wondering what the other looked like ‘broken’, and that would hardly be conducive to either of them. He’d just have to keep jabbing.

Harry took another sip of his wine.

“How are you getting on with the Voldemort case?” he changed the subject.

Harry’s eyes flickered.
“Is that a subtle way of asking again why I came to your house at 4am covered in blood?”

Tom didn’t let his lips twitch.

“Whilst I’m all for client confidentiality, and your being able to divulge at your own pace, an explanation would not be unwarranted given the circumstances,” he stated.

Harry sighed heavily, rubbing his eyes.

“I went to Voldemort for a deal to spare the other victims. Obviously, the bastard isn’t in the habit of releasing those who he has marked for death, and certainly not for free.”

“They said your family was dead.” Tom kept his voice quiet, unjudging, trying not to pounce and claw for all the delicious details. Though, he supposed the hollow look in Harry’s eyes the other night spoke a lot.

It was one of the few times Harry met his eyes utterly unflinchingly, inner strength allowed to the surface.

“Yes, and do you remember what I’d the done the last time I was that messed up around you?” the other raised his brows.

Tom suspected, disappointedly, that it was as much of a confession as he was likely to get.

“It would help you to move on if you said the words aloud,” he tried.

“I don’t want to move on,” Harry said, surprising him. His brows furrowed. Harry twisted the glass in his fingers. “Moving on is...accepting it in some way, justifying it. It’s bad enough to do that in my head. I can’t do it out loud without being one step closer to becoming him. Moving on...this isn’t something I should be able to...move on.”

Smethwyck was right about one thing; Harry’s psyche was an extraordinary thing.

“You place a lot of significance on what you should be,” he murmured. Harry blinked, once more, wetting his lips.

“Doesn’t everyone?”

“Yes. Society has trained us to imagine and work towards ideals, sometimes impossible ones.”

“You have an issue with that.” Harry returned, shrewdly, no question in his voice.

“I think...people limit themselves and make themselves unnecessarily unhappy by focusing so greatly on these perceived notions, over what they actually are.”

“Are you telling me you don’t?” Harry snorted. “Hell, even Voldemort has ideals, however twisted they may be.”

Tom’s gaze sharpened.

“What ideals would you say Voldemort has?”

Harry’s head tilted at the question.
“You seem sceptical that he has any? Considering your previous statement that everyone does…”

Tom was silent for a moment, treading carefully ahead of this conversation in his mind.

“Voldemort has ideals, but not in the way of other people. He doesn’t have self-ideals for how he should be, he just is.” He paused. “At least that’s the impression I got off him, from all I’ve seen and heard, if I were to sit him down on my couch. Obviously, I do not have the same insight to him as you, and so must defer o your judgment on the matter, but-”

“-No, Harry mused. “I get it. He has ideals, but he inflicts them on other people instead. He thinks he’s perfect, better than everyone else. Nietzsche’s ubermensch. That’s probably why he doesn’t respect anyone.”

“What do you mean?” Tom asked, genuinely curious. “I get the impression he feels highly of you, considering the effort he’s going to involving you.”

This...was not how he’d expected this to go. Obviously, the appeal of Harry was his capacity to understand him, connect where other people couldn’t (and he didn’t want to simplify it to anything so sentimental) but...he was suddenly strangely uneasy.

Exactly how close had the boy inadvertently got? When had Harry started looking and seeing more than the strands Tom allowed to swirl around him like chains?

“Oh, he thinks *highly* of me,” Harry murmured. “But in the sense one would look at an object. I am an idea on a pedestal to him. He doesn’t respect me, he doesn’t respect anyone - he covets, admires in some sense, wants to possess.”

“Interesting deduction,” Tom managed to get out.

Harry shrugged.

“He views me in the opposite way I do him. I…” the other suddenly went silent, for a long time.
“I...respect him in a way. I respect his power, his intelligence. But I don’t admire him the way he admires me. I don’t like him. I don’t envy him, or want anything that he’s got. It would be awful to him.”

Tom wanted to snarl at that statement - because how could it be worse to be him, when Harry was the one so near breaking?! It took everything he had to remain blank. “Voldemort wants me, I act as a desired sort of...*prize*. A trophy of his murders. But he doesn’t *respect* me, I don’t think he really considers me outside of the parameters of his own projections at all. People don’t respect their victims. Respect requires a sense of equality, or superiority, and the very nature of a victim is someone you have power over.”

Harry seemed to come back to himself, out of whatever trail of thought he’d been following. Tom forced himself to breath out, deliberately, the image of calm despite the odd feeling in his blood. He wasn’t sure why he felt almost...uncomfortable, exposed like a raw nerve.

He didn’t tear his eyes away

“Do you view yourself as his victim?” he questioned, keeping his voice light.

Harry’s gaze raked over him, and there was something electric in the air.

“I think...I think if I view myself as his victim, that I’ll become it. People can be made victims by circumstance, but on a more personal level I believe victimhood is a state of mind.”

Tom drained the rest of his own glass. Harry’s eyes glanced up at him once more, tracking his movements.

“Do you view me as Voldemort’s victim? I think most people do. Needing therapy for trauma…”

“I think you’re a lot stronger than you would let people believe, whether you’re conscious of the deception or not. You don’t project steel, you project vulnerability. Victimhood. Sheep instead of the wolf, perhaps because you’re in some part scared of the wolf, even though it’s part of you. You cover your real strength with this parody of it, with the general attitude, hiding from everyone including yourself.”

Harry’s mouth opened for a second to say something, eyes wide with shock at the words, shoulders stiffening a little, before his jaw clicked shut, before opening once more.

“This coming from you? Half the time I wonder…”he stopped again.

“Wonder what?”

“How much of you is real. Obviously, you project a professional front, you have to, I’m your...client, so you’re always going to have done so.”

“This seems to bother you,” he remarked. Harry had made enough snappish comments on the matter,

one way or another, for that to be more than evident. “I assure you,” he continued, “that’s a natural response and product of my being your psychiatrist. You feel the need to even the knowledge base out-”

“-Is it so shocking to you that perhaps, just maybe, I’m simply curious about Tom Riddle the person and not the doctor, because I consider you one of my friends?” Harry bit out. “Or is that an inappropriate definition when you’re paid by the hour to listen to my problems?”

“The hour stopped when Healer Smethwyck left,” Tom pointed out. “You trust me in the hours you’re off the clock more than you ever talk to me in a session.”

Maybe he shouldn’t admit such a thing explicitly, because of the suggestions on both of their side - maybe he should keep that professional distance...but he’d already acknowledged to himself that the more he saw, the more he wanted.

Perhaps Harry was right, in a way.
He’d always been in the habit of taking trophies, coveting what other people had, regardless of if he truly wanted or needed it.

Harry studied him closely, and the air seemed to grow even sharper as the silence dragged. The other swayed forwards slightly.

“Then show me something real,” Harry challenged, softly. “Something other than the suit and the cover of your psychiatric interests. What else goes on in your head?”

Tom’s mind immediately started racing through his options, a way to turn this advantage. He could lie - he should lie, considering the most honest parts of him were murder and pain. Everything violent and dark, everything that it cost most for him to tell.

As the silence grew between them, he could just watch Harry’s face close too.

“Forget it,” the boy said stiffly, standing up.
He stood up too, at the same time, before he was aware of it, and took several advanced steps forward until there was barely a breath between them.

Harry froze completely on the spot, as Tom let his fingers slowly trail up like he’d been wanting to do for a while now, scraping along the pulse point until he was holding the boy’s chin deftly between his fingers .

Then he crushed their lips together.

Because he only had one thing outside of violence - and that was *want.*

Chapter End Notes

Believe it or not, I can't actively write tension, and I can't tell when it's in my writing. Hopefully this hit the spot and wasn't way off the mark, contrived and awful. It's so different trying to actively write a relationship. Subtext is so much easier :/ Reviews would be much appreciated on how I did, or if this kiss thing just came out as terrible and forced.

Part One: 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry couldn't say that kissing Tom Riddle was pleasant.

'Pleasant' was too pale a word when it felt like every nerve ending in his body had been electrified.

His eyes widened in shock, a rather embarrassing squeak he would never admit to escaping his mouth, before it softened to a small moan and he pressed forward automatically.

Of course, he'd imagined - in however idle or vague a way - what kissing Tom would be like before, though that was another point on his list of things he would profusely deny if ever questioned on. It didn't compare.

It felt like the world had narrowed down to one sharp shard of focus, following the heat of Tom's mouth against his own, and the slight tug at the roots of his hair when the other's fingers settled there, after it was obvious he wasn't protesting.

Harry's own hand crept up beneath the expensive material of Tom's three piece suit, as if he could claw the whole facade of professional away and leave the man as bare under his gaze as he always felt beneath the other's scrutiny, nails scraping against and mapping the unblemished skin.

Infuriatingly, he could still sense how contained Tom was being, even if the restraints had significantly loosened - as if the psychiatrist was terrified of the consequences of letting go entirely.

He could understand, he really could, but it still irritated him given the circumstances and his own prior demand. He bit down, hard enough to draw blood, was rewarded with a small gasp, something less composed, and then being abruptly shoved back into the seat he'd just rose from with the other's heavier weight pinning him down as Tom straddled him.

He felt a smirk, more careless than he'd managed in a while, cross his lips in triumph, and pulled the man closer. Whilst he hated being sucked into people's mind involuntarily, he had to admit there was a certain sense of appeal to worming his way into Tom's chest and validating his presence there, finding out what made him tick.

He could still feel a splinter of something hidden away, however much he tried to jab at it, wondered what was so terrible, brimming just beneath the surface, but he didn't mind. He hadn't asked Tom to give him *everything*, just something real. And this was real, he could feel it - sense it in the way Tom crushed close to him and hostaged all thought and oxygen.

He liked the thought of having more pieces to learn and appreciate as time went on.

He felt dizzy from lack of air, in a heady, intoxicating sort of way, ground himself closer, legs wrapping eagerly around Tom's waist, causing the man to lurch a little and brace himself with his hands on either side of Harry's head.

He took the opportunity to pull back a little, as they both gasped down some air, Tom's head tipping forward a little, breath caressing over the pulse on his neck, their lips still inches away and - Harry froze completely as the reality of the situation crashed down on him, outside of waves of pleasure.

He shoved the other away in one quick movement, receiving a look of utter confusion that almost made him want to yank the other forwards again by his - delightfully crooked - tie.

Tom's eyes were glazed, with an intensity he rarely saw in them, his lips red and swollen - the immaculate facade splintered as he was sprawled bewildered and a bit pissed off on the floor by the chair. Harry doubted he himself looked much better, and for a moment he stared. He swallowed, thickly, felt sense slowly return to him without the maddening tease of Tom's fingers and lips gliding and crushing against him, the exquisite friction between them that pooled in his stomach, and squeezed his eyes shut, standing.

"I-I'm sorry - I can't - I just-*Voldemort*!"

Hermione paused at the sight that greeted her.

Harry was sitting against her front door, worrying his lip, hair dishevelled and clothes rumpled. She blinked, honestly not have expecting to find him there as she clutched her shopping.

He looked up at her, looking helplessly lost.
"I just kissed Tom."

She let out a breath she didn't know was holding, and indicated for him to shift, so she could let both of them in.

"I'll put the kettle on," she said, dumping the bags down as Harry trailed in after her, shutting the door.

"I mean," and she wasn't sure if Harry was actually talking to her or himself, "technically he kissed me - and he really is very kissable, but-bloody hell."

"What happened?" she asked, torn between curiosity and intense disapproval. Riddle was Harry's psychiatrist! He had no place to be doing this, it was utterly unprofessional of him. If he found himself compromised in objectivity, he should have referred Harry to somebody else already!

Except, of course, she could acknowledge Harry was unlikely to find somebody else he would actually talk to very easily.

She'd heard all about the Dursley fiasco from Ron - honestly didn't know what to think of him anymore. She didn't...blame him, she could understand why he did it, but...but it was just wrong!

It wasn't his fault. Her best friend was practically screaming out for help. It was appalling that the Aurors hadn't interceded before it got this bad. He was very clearly a total mess!

Harry ran his hands through his hair, pacing up and down her kitchen.

"I ran."

"You *ran*?" she repeated. Psychiatrist or not - "Harry, you can't just kiss someone and just - just run! Did you say anything to him?"

Harry grimaced, and she sighed.

"Why did you run?" she asked. He gave her a flat look.

"Do I look like I'm in any position to have a relationship with anyone?" he raised his brows, and she could easily acknowledge the point. Harry wasn't stable enough for a relationship, he just wasn't. Recent events yelled that out so very clearly, that it was appalling that Riddle would even try and kiss Harry and confuse him more.. "And Voldemort has this habit of killing people I get close to," Harry continued, more to himself than anything else. "He's already attacked Tom once - I just - I couldn't. I actually like him."

"Please tell you stopped to explain some of this to him before bolting?" she returned, though already had her suspicion on the answer. Harry grimaced once more, accepting the cup of tea she shoved into his hand, though making no effort to actually drink it. "Harry, you have got to go and talk to him."

"He's smart, I'm sure he can figure it out."

"Harry!"

Harry set the cup down, wiping at his glasses again in a fashion she was beginning to loathe. She leaned against the counter, reaching down to pull her shoes off.

"I really like him, Hermione," he mumbled. "That makes it okay, doesn't it?"

"He's your psychiatrist. It's…."

"I know."

"And like you said, you're not really in any position to be-"

"I *know*."

"And Voldemort-"

"Hermione, I know!" He snapped, fists clenching. "You don't actually need to give me the reasons for and against, they've probably already gone through my head."

She tried not to feel hurt, and his shoulders hunched defensively.

"Sorry…"

"What do you want me to say then?" she questioned, folding her arms. "If you don't want my advice or opinion on the matter."

"I don't know," Harry muttered. "I guess I just wanted someone to listen."

Hermione softened, taking a step forward, but he shook his head, took a step back.

"Harry…" she said, softly. She tried to shove her own distaste aside. "Just talk to him. Clearly he's the one you need to talk to, not me. Do you want me to pretend to be him so you can practice?"

Harry snorted, but his shoulders untensed.

"No...no you're right. I should talk to him. I just- I don't know what to say."

"Tell him what you told me."

Harry nodded, wetted his lips.

"Thanks," he murmured. She gave him a slightly strained smile.

"Anytime." She paused, curiosity bubbling again. "So...was he a good kisser?"

Harry burst out laughing.

Tom Riddle was in a rather foul mood, though he tried to force himself to calm.

He'd had many expectations for kissing Harry, and he had to admit the boy had exceeded them. Though frankly, he didn't bloody well expect the brat to run out after practically screaming 'Voldemort' at him.

He didn't think it was an accusation, Harry hadn't phrased it as one, but in a way it would have been less offensive if it was because at least he could have simply attacked him and all pretenses on the matter would have dropped.

As it was, he was left trying to catch up, and he absolutely hated the feeling.
Regarding the case of Harry Potter, he was rather used to feeling in control, with every step and outcome planned in his head.

He'd never factored this in, or the fact he would actually care if Harry ran away from kissing him. He wasn't that bloody bad a kisser! Actually, experience dictated he was a very good kisser and the other had certainly been enjoying himself.

Of course, at the time he'd been wary of letting the link open and projecting, so maybe not getting up so tangled was logically a good thing.

It didn't stop the dissatisfied ache though, the irritable frustration pooled in the pit of his stomach, and the overwhelming urge to kill something.

It was that, or find someone to finish what he started with Harry with (though he supposed that was true in both options of sex or violence) and he suspected the latter would be better for their overall relationship.

He could make dinner, and the boy could explain instead of just running so *rudely.*
If he didn't have a good enough explanation for his behaviour, then at least he got a rather exquisite dessert out of the affair either way.

His eyes narrowed.
He couldn't even settle on drawing, he felt too agitated.

He worked well in his job, and in his extracurriculars, through a sense of objective distance that allowed him to see and plan everything. Whilst he'd fully intended to crawl into Harry's skin and head, he'd failed to consider how different things looked up close up, and how difficult it was to connect the dots when they blurred around him without the advantage of uncluttered vision.

Not that he had any intention of letting him go. Especially not now.
As amusing as Harry was, he wasn't sure he could forgive the boy fleeing like that.

He strode across his kitchen, feeling an odd finally come across him as he decided. It was an icy sort of calm, as he plucked out his recipe book and considered the list of people he didn't like.

Maybe he had to do something to prod Harry into thinking about the people he really didn't want to lose in his life, something that would require Harry to need his psychiatrist rather desperately. If he didn't want him, he could damn well need him.

The feeling of Harry's mouth against his drifted through his mind as started his preparations with steady hands, the strain in the other's trousers as he'd been pressed against him, fingers tracing fire against his cool skin, the small ident of bitten skin on his lip that he sucked on as he thought. He'd have to be careful, he wasn't willing to go to prison for the boy, he had to frame the murder in something else.

He'd never thought Ron Weasley was a good friend for his *prize.*

If *Voldemort* was the better option to kissing Tom Riddle, then that was what the boy could get.

After all, it was only want or violence….

A slow smile spread across his lips.

Chapter End Notes

I'm guessing you guys probably weren't expecting full on smut, considering this is me. It will happen eventually, it's slotted in as a scene in my head however difficult it is for me to actually write, but I refuse to compromise my plot and characterization for getting them together. Sorry for those of you who somehow started reading me for smut. But anyway, I hope you enjoyed the chapter nonetheless :)

Part One: 24

Tom knew where the Auror lived, of course. He'd known for a whilst now.
Most people really didn't seem to realize how fragile their illusion of security really was. They thought, just because they were at home, that they were safe.

He loved snatching people from where they were safe, lulling them and then ripping the safety net away from them to watch them flounder.

Fear was by far one of the most fascinating of human emotions.
He relished every scrap he could draw, and the frisson it sent in the meat. Fear brought out the darkness lurking in people, their willingness to do anything to survive, the hunger.

He grabbed his coat, all of his equipment packed neatly in his bag, and headed for the door.

It was a crisp night, and with such a heavy feeling in his bones, perfect for murder.

He needed to get himself under control before his next session with Harry, because in his current mood he would not be able to resist from dragging a scream from his lips and watching blood well up on the other's skin. He certainly didn't have the patience to tolerate Smethwyck.

He took a glance around the road, before disapparating.

Harry didn't know how to actually breach the conversation topic, since he suspected by Hermione's reaction that a simple sorry wasn't going to cut it.

Not when he'd asked the man to bear himself, and then fled at what he got. After yelping out the name of a notorious serial killer, at that...

So he made dinner. He was actually quite a good cook, and Riddle seemed to enjoy that type of thing. It was a peace offering, as much as it was a barrier because it gave him something to hold and offer. Some initial small talk or sentence to start out with, rather than a gaping chasm of possible explanations and icebreakers.

Riddle wasn't in when he arrived, however, and he had no idea how long the other would be out or where he even was. He sat stiffly down on the doorstep with a heating charm to wait - if only because he left he wasn't sure he could bring himself to come back. Even for sessions.

Slowly, however, as the time dragged on, he found himself slumping as his initial panic faded, the race of justifications and excuses in his head, and his eyes slowly drooped.

Then everything went black.

Snatching Weasley was all too easy. For an Auror, he wasn't the smartest tool in the shed, and in comparison to working his way around the best defences the entire ministry could give, such a thing was child's play to the dark wizard.

Still, Tom preferred to kill in an environment he could entirely control and predict, and the Auror's house wasn't such a place as he'd never been there before.

He had the other knocked out and dragged, stashed in his bag with no broken bones. Yet. He rather prided himself on that extendable charm. Nobody would ever suspect how much stuff he had in the seemingly small bag. It also meant he could better contain things.

He absolutely did not expect to find Harry Potter fast asleep on his doorway, and was torn between laughing at the sight, or being incredulous that the other man would be so stupid as to leave himself vulnerable with a serial killer after him.

Regardless if he was the serial killer, that was hardly the point.

He was also suddenly very aware that he had a victim in his bag, and that if Harry caught even a glimpse that it would be all over.

The thought sent a delicious thrill down his spine. Though he couldn't say he was less irritated with the man. He took a careful step closer, before sniffing delicately, spying some tupperware containers under a stasis charm.

He plucked it up, examining it, before his eyebrows arched in surprise.
Harry had made him dinner.

It softened his mood, though considering how foul his mood had been that might not be saying much to most people. It spared Harry's life though, because the current itch of bloodlust under his skin would have had him gutting the boy on sight pre-kill.

Despite his knowledge of how valuable Harry was.

Weasley would still die. He wasn't so forgiving, and the urge to kill was very difficult to shake once it settled.

Still. He adjusted his grip, considered waking the boy but wasn't sure he wouldn't do something rather on the Voldemort end of the spectrum if he had to listen to his excuses, and so finally just scooped him up. Harry stirred immediately as he was settled on his shoulders, tensing.

"Wha-Tom?" he slurred, before seeming to snap into awareness, struggling to get down.

It was very difficult to resist just knock him out again, and have a rather less refrained conversation in his other persona. Still, he let Harry down on the other side of the door, pulling it shut, and didn't offer him a hand when he swayed unsteadily.

If the man insisted on working late and getting sleep deprived, that wasn't his problem. At least not when he wasn't being paid to care.

"Do you normally lurk outside my door?" he questioned, coolly.

Harry wetted his lips, looked around with a slightly desperate air which may have otherwise been funny, before noticing his tupperware containers in Tom's hand.

"I made you dinner," the other tried. "I mean. I...I came to apologize. But you were out. And I only meant to wait a bit. Sorry."

"Which bit are you sorry for?" he returned, pushing the container back in Harry's hand. "The part where you shoved me of you in the middle of kissing, the fact you then ran, or the fact you decided to scream Voldemort at me? Because you might forget I am technically a suspect, despite I could hardly

be old enough to murder your parents, but it is a little more difficult on my side of the spectrum to ignore when I could go to prison for it."

Harry's fingers twisted as he stared at the floor.

"All of them. I-bloody hell, I panicked, okay? I wasn't expecting you to kiss me! And the-you're my psychiatrist and-I mean, I enjoyed it, I did...I just...I can't do a relationship at the moment. One, Voldemort has a habit of killing people close to me - you should know, he already threatened to kill you once - and half the time my head is scrambled and it's not fair to put that pressure on you all the time because it's not like my...er, issues are going to magically disappear just because we get together!"

An argument could in some way be made against that, except that would require revealing his identity.

Tom blinked. Whatever he'd been expecting, that wasn't it, especially as he could literally feel Harry's sincerity radiating at him. He'd expected some flimsy protest of 'I'm not gay' or whatever else.

"Well, at least you didn't start that explanation with 'it's not you it's me'," he stated.

Harry gave a snort, tugging a hand through his already wild hair.

"I'm sorry. I...didn't have the best reaction. I should have talked instead of running. I just didn't know what to do."

"Well, talking to your psychiatrist is normally how people deal with such things," Tom murmured. Harry shot him a weak grin.

"Yeah, I don't think that would be a good thing to bring up around Smethwyck. He'd have a field day. And then I'd probably get referred to him permenantly, and bloody hell even Voldemort has more grace than that twat."

"Voldemort kills people regardless," Tom tried,reaching out to nudge Harry's gaze to meet his own. "Surely that means you should make the most of it whilst you can? When you or they could die any day?"

Harry bit his lip.

"Maybe. Doesn't change the fact I'm not exactly...stable at the moment."

"I'm fully aware of what your psychological state is like, I'm your psychiatrist," he replied, trying not to sound impatient. Harry raised his brows, looked at him flatly.

"Yeah. But are you being objective about it? This isn't a bad teen romance, I'm not just going to suddenly be chipper and normal and happy if we kiss or have sex or whatever. It...doesn't work like that."

"Harry, I know." Now some of the impatience slipped through. "Do you not think I managed to think of all of this before?

Harry grimaced sheepishly.

Tom resisted the urge to pounce, to press his advantage - to go for the short term gratification of taking what he wanted, rather than the greater pleasure of Harry offering it willingly.

"I don't understand you, Tom," Harry murmured.

"You will," he promised. "With time. Trust me. Perhaps you should be getting home now?"

Harry swallowed, face dropping just slightly, before falling into perfect composure.

"Yes. Sorry. It's late. I need to stop intruding on you like this," the boy said, quickly, taking a step back. "I just-I needed to explain himself." The man at hesitated at the door, and Tom could feel that hunger swelling in his chest the longer the other stayed in front of him, so blissfully oblivious to the danger he was still in. He imagined the widening of green eyes if he was to lunge forward now, grab Harry by his throat and watch the Auror struggle for oxygen, pinks lips parted and pliant, gasping.

He noted Harry's gaze had fixed on his now. Noticed the other's throat bob.
"We're...er...are we good?" the other asked.

"We're good," Tom stated, the rush growing beneath his fingers. He had too much energy built up right now, simmering rage and violence and that old want still in his blood.

"Good," Harry breathed. And maybe there was that want in the other's eyes too, fractured and different from his own, softer and sadder, but nonetheless there, gleaming among the verdant green. Tom found himself taking a step closer, then another. Harry's eyes fluttered shut as his fingers scraped gently over his cheek, as if frozen in the moment before shivering.

"It really is a shame," Tom murmured, almost against Harry's lips, "that you do not feel open to a relationship with me. I think you need something to make you feel good, outside of Voldemort's murders." He let his hand trace over Harry's throat as he swallowed again, eyes opening.

"Tom…" he started. Tom tightened his grip as it fell on Harry's shoulder, bypassing the jugular with some difficulty, and opened the door.

"I'll see you tomorrow," he said, in a much more professional tone, leaving Harry gaping at him, a slight flush of heat on his cheeks and the back of his neck.

"I-yeah, right. I was just leaving."
He very obviously didn't want to. Maybe he didn't want to go back to the haunting emptiness of his own flat.

Even if Harry was denying it, it was clear something had shifted. The other looked at him, again, judging the way he was still more closed now, as if any barriers that had been opened had shuttered once more. He could practically see the pain of that, the hopelessness and the guilt - that isolation again.

Harry was terrified of being alone, perhaps because he never really was, and so feared being isolated with nobody but Voldemort to turn to in his own head. Nothing else to rely on except crumbling precipices which wouldn't be lasting much longer.

He could practically rub his fingers on Harry's barriers and defences, and watch them crumble to dust under the small pressure. He was inside, he'd crawled into Harry's heart and mind in all ways possible, even if he'd yet to complete his invasion. He was there, and it would always be so much more difficult to shake something that was already under your skin.

It sent triumph tingling through his mouth, despite everything. He could delicately pick away all that remained now, suck on the bone marrow until they were empty and he could fill them with his own.

Own completely. Possess and cherish.

Harry wetted his lips, before turning and disapparating off the end of the porch without looking back.

Tom turned to his kill.

He suspected it would be over soon.

Part One: 25

Weasley woke slowly, eyelids fluttering as if exhausted by the weight of the world.

It's not like Harry would wake up.

Harry would jolt into consciousness, like a man surging gasping from cold water, or the terrible nightmares which haunted the green-eyed man's dreaming hours. His body would be a taut line of tension which he could run his fingers down, chased by his lips as he watched the other shudder.

His victim now is flaccid. A limp smudge of stirring limbs and veins and bones and muscles - nothing extraordinary. He doesn't want to claw beneath his intestines, splicing his care like a knife between the ribs or breathe in every small scent and shift and flicker of emotion.

But he can feel the urge under his skin nonetheless, even in this displacement. The writhing darkness that twisted inside of him, itching and twitching beneath a friendly smile until it could lash out and he could be himself, as he is supposed to be. A creature of wrath and monstrous beauty.

He watched sky-blue eyes focus on him, so different to the ones he wanted to see - too pale, not bright and broken enough. The dissatisfaction pinched in his chest. Maybe it had been doing so for a while now.

"Riddle?" the Auror demanded, incredulously, starting to sit up - instantly realizing the restraints he was under and going still. Noting the way his arms and legs were spread. It only took a second, but maybe this was the bit that Tom enjoyed most.

He saw the horror filter in, the rage, the complete and utter fear which couldn't be denied. They were always so scared when they woke up, though maybe he could have some admiration for the way Weasley's jaw clenched around pleas for mercy unspoken, teeth gritted with rage.

He smiled, pleasantly.

"You're Voldemort." The horror was manifested now, such sweet horror. "Harry doesn't know."

"Don't they have intelligent tests to allow you into the Auror department?" He should be composed, he normally is, but there's a...rush. He knew this man was close to Harry, could envision in detail the

effect, scratch at piece after piece of the rest of Harry's life until it belonged solely to him, without some red head or a mudblood laying claim to what was and would always be his.

"Why are you doing this?"
It's a pointless question, one Weasley shouldn't need to ask but which they always do - though this one has a chin which juts in defiance and clenching fingers in their shackles.

"...because I can?" It was the most honest answer he could give. "Because everyone needs a creative outlet for a healthy and sane mind? Harry agrees that I'm quite the talented artist. He pretty much told me so."

"You sick-" Weasley began, viciously.

"Oh no, no, no…" Tom purred. "I'm perfectly healthy. Don't worry. No need to be rude."
He hummed, turning away from the specimen, letting his fingers run over his equipment as he contemplated.

Of course, he didn't need to have a variety of knives and other medieval assortments lined up in front of his victims, and he didn't even use most of them - but the fearful effect they created really was rather delicious.

He'd have to fact dinner in.
Harry tended to stop eating when he got upset.

He could feel the Auror thrashing and struggling behind him, hear his rabbit-heart fluttering frantically in his chest. Not that it did the man any good. He was too well secured. There was nothing he could do, and Tom was certain they wouldn't be interrupted this time.

He turned again, noticed the ugly sweat pooling against his prey's t-shirt, the slight belly born of paperwork and sugar in tea. Contemplated his options, everything already sterilized and prepared beforehand in the space between Harry's departure and waking up.

He could have picked Granger, of course - she'd always posed a greater threat with her intelligence, and with wiped memories crumbled in her head. But this was much more to his preference, and Granger was more tolerable than most.

"So what type of butterfly am I going to be?" Weasley tried, acidically. Whilst reactions were art in themselves, which final moments catalogued against the thing they couldn't escape, and he could, the Auror was starting to ruin his buzz with his voice.

He let his smile only broaden.

“Oh, you’re not going to be graced with such beauty, Mr Weasley.”

Then there was blood, and screaming, and the only real happiness and freedom he ever felt.

Harry knew he should go back to his flat after leaving Tom, get some of the rest his body desperately pleaded for, but...well, he couldn’t.

There were many differences between his bed and flat, and by all accounts he should reasonably prefer his own.

He doesn’t.

His own flat seemed too cold and sterile, a parody of a home - never lived in, barely used as the months slipped by without the Voldemort case being solved. He was barely ever there, and all that is there is more work.

What used to be a spare room is a stripped down web of images and articles, exactly like his office, to peer at scenes of bloody murder in the night because if he shut his eyes he’d be doing so again in a far more intimate, less lucid way.

The fridge has some stale milk, and a half used tub of butter. A carton of Orange Juice and a the cupboard some bread. Some cakes Mrs Weasley had sent him a months ago, in a care parcel, from when he’d first started seeing Tom. There are the remnants of the dinner he’d made Tom still, a small touch of activity in an otherwise frozen snapshot.

The only thing he has in any significant quantity is beer and firewhiskey, and he doesn’t like to think what that says about the man he’s become.

The entirety of the flat is clinical, something which may have been homely a long time ago but which had faded along with him until it was a place to sleep, and sometimes not even that.

Tom's house, by comparison, was warm and elegant, with soft sheets and a kitchen that was always full of delicious looking things and a recently used, well cared for atmosphere. Everything was gleaming and clean, and whilst he wouldn't necessarily say the man's house was anything but as immaculate as the psychiatrist himself, it fits Tom.

There are signs of life, of rich classical symphonies played on record, and of no dust beneath the cabinets. He's never seen Tom's bedroom, and the thought now made something seize up and spasm in Harry's chest, but he imagined that would be less stiff than his own creased sheets.

Maybe the crux of it is that his flat was empty, and Tom's had...well, Tom.
Hell, in recent days, it was a toss-up if he spent more time stewing in Riddle's office, or his own.

Either way, it would surprise absolutely *nobody* that he went back to his office instead, slipping into the darkened Ministry, far more familiar with the vacancy of everyone having left it more or less than employees really should have any right to.

Initially, Scrimgeour had kicked him out, told him to go home - but when it was more than obvious that he was just lugging books and case notes back to his flat and continuing there, they relented and figured he may as well just stay in his office if he was that desperate.

He settled at his desk, rubbing his bleary eyes, feeling the photos around him and his memories smear across his vision. He didn't know where he stood with Tom now, and it left him uneasy, cursing his own stupidity in bolting like that.

He'd been trying to protect the other, but it seemed Voldemort wasn't the only one capable of hurting people. He was already intimately aware of his own capacities for destruction.

He flicked open his book on Geneology once more. Didn't think about Tom's lips crushed against his own, and the heat coiling down his spine, the breath puffing against his pulse at the heady intent in his psychiatrist's eyes as he leaned in close to him…before promptly gesturing him out of the door.

He tugged at his hair. Tom was too distracting. He should be focused on Voldemort, because the sooner he caught the killer, the sooner everything would get better.

The sooner he could sleep.

He froze on the page he was about to flick past, going back.

The Gaunts. Very old family, fallen off the scale.

He'd decided to focus on the less known purebloods, bypassing the Blacks and Malfoys because whilst they were mostly a long line of Slytherins both, he was also certain they would not make such a heritage secret.

His eyes narrowed down the trace of names…Medea…many others…Marvolo…Morfin…Merope…

And then it cut. The book, an old pureblood text, just seemed burned and charred. It was supposed to be self-updating, it should have been easy to find the pureblood Slytherin Lord.

Unless…unless of course Voldemort himself wasn't a pureblood. His eyes moved to Merope Gaunt again, thoughtfully. The time date would work, though Voldemort would be older than any of them expected if that was the case.

Then again, he remembered those scarlet eyes, the snakelike visage and bone-white skin. Inhuman. He also remembered wondering if that was the Dark Wizard's real face, or a glamour. It could be anyone. A half blood male, who he was convinced to be in some way related to the Gaunt family…

Definitely time to do some more thorough research into the family history, and what had happened to Merope Gaunt.

He was just standing when a dizzying sense of happiness, and violence surged through him, alien. He could have moaned, sinking to the ground, his head spinning. It was unfettered, unrestrained, and he clawed at it faintly – would have followed it if he had the Mind Arts capabilities. Could only breathe in and out, clutching the leg of the table trying not to pass out beneath the overwhelming sensation, to remain within himself and not feel the hot blood dripping across his hands.

He felt his breathing grow shallower, eyes widening, blank and glazed, fixed on a point in the wall. He wished he could stop himself from shuddering all over. He wasn't asleep, wasn't dragged into the murder so easily, maybe he was even being blocked, he didn't know…

Everything was hazing around him, images flashing in his eyes. Red hair, red skin stained and…oh god…oh god…

He was glad he was already sitting down when he blacked out.

He'd known that the crime scene was coming, of course, but…nothing could have steeled Harry for it either way.

No immediate deductions would come to mind, just the onslaught of emotions again, that wild happiness surging in his chest so at odds with the bile in his throat.

His mind felt fragmented, buzzing with white noise. Even Gaunt didn't matter right then. He stared, face slack and his eyes hollow.

He'd first met Ron in first year, and they'd been best friends ever since. The other had always been there when he needed him, in his own way. He'd been the first friend he ever had, the first to make him feel like maybe he was normal.

And this…this was his fault. He could hear people saying it wasn't, but it *was*.
He breathed in, out. Could feel people buzzing around him, taking photos of the crime scene, the dingy back alley.

He couldn't think of him simply as the 'victim', he couldn't. Whilst he'd never been able to disengage himself from Voldemort's crimes as he would have liked, in the recent months it had all got so much more personal.

Sometimes he wondered if he should succumb, give in, lay himself down at the bastard's feet and beg for the mercy of not killing anyone else. He'd give anything to have the crushing burden lifted from him, to see vacant eyes spring to a familiar life again, with a warm smile tugging at lips.

A choked sound caught in his chest.
The message was clear enough, even in shock. He clutched his arms tighter around himself, protectively, unable to pretend anymore that everything was fine.

He was sinking. Barely even noticed when he was sitting on the floor, all professionalism moot and discarded. Maybe he'd never had it.

Nothing about this was fine. Absolutely nothing!
He had to make the bastard pay for this. He just had to. Stop him. He squeezed his eyes shut. Heard someone yell about contaminating the crime scene. None of it would make sense in his hears.

He flinched and startled, the world sounding like it was being issued from underwater, when a hand came to rest on his shoulders. He opened his eyes. Blinked. Looked up at her. At the blood on his hands where he'd automatically caught himself.

"Harry?" Tonks eyed him worriedly. His mouth felt dry, didn't want to form the words "Get him off the scene, for god's sake!" he heard his fellow Auror cry.

He wondered how he must look to them, how *weak,* that even Scrimgeour didn't protest after everything. The pity wanted to make him sick. He couldn't tear his eyes away, even when someone grabbed him by his shoulders to steer him away, hauling him up, dabbing at his hands with a dump cloth.

He could hear Tonks screaming at their boss for even bringing him in the first place. Felt too numb to appreciate it. Kept one foot going in front of the other. Felt the demand for analysis, just like always, perched beneath his chin.

The body looked rotten, covered in what looked like maggots crawling in and out of him and his ravaged chest. On closer examination, he found they weren't maggots at all. They were catterpillars. Hundreds of catterpillars.

Not yet butterflies.
Maybe the victim of choice screamed out the reason.

He wondered if Voldemort knew of his deception, and was punishing for it. Let out a shaky breath. Maybe he should cry, feel the hot tears swell across his cheeks and burn down in a trail but there was just – just nothing.

He wasn't sure he had anything left to give anymore.
At times it felt better, he'd revitalise, pull on his reserves of strength and convince himself that he could bring Voldemort to justice. Another murder should provide him with more evidence, more and more opportunity for a slip up, and he had Gaunt now – but…

Every time he crashed. Something like this would happen, and it would. All. Just. Crash. A hopeless rage he didn't have the eloquence to verbalise, heart feeling too faint and too raw at the same time to make any sense.

Just sensations and impressions.

"Caterpillars. Not yet Butterflies. He's a link to such things. He's my old life. Who I currently am. A tie. Voldemort took his heart and put caterpillars in its place. I'm moving too slowly. Not growing. Stuck decomposing instead of becoming what he wants me to be."

"Harry-" it was Kingsley with him, he noted it absently, voice low and soothing. "You don't have to talk. It's okay."

It wasn't okay. He wanted to scream at the useless attempt at comfort. He pulled away, barely refrained from sprinting away from his problem again. Running and running as if he could escape everything happening and never look back.

He stopped instead, shuddering.

Gaunt.

Maybe Hermione would hate him for this.
He hated himself for it too.

He didn't understand anymore.

Didn’t know how long he sat in his office, unscrambling his mind, setting himself to rights for the final battle. He could practically taste Voldemort’s identity. Heard the door creak open, didn’t want to deal with Hermione’s tears. Ignored Smethwyck too as the man offered his condolences and his starched repulsive version of pity and sympathy.

Didn’t say a word. Let his mind drift away from Ron, to Gaunts and the story he was tracing.

Still knew the second Tom walked in, obviously called in to deal with the broken Auror. He gave a bitter laugh at that, disconnected.

“What’s wrong with me?” he asked, quietly.

“Excuse me?”

“What’s wrong with me? What’s so bad about me that I…bring out such violence and hate in somebody?”

He kept his eyes on his notes, stiffened as a hand slipped around his waist.

“Let’s get you home,” Tom murmured. Harry shook his head, drew strength, the scraps of it and mashed it into sword and shield, straightened.

“No. I have something I need to take care of.”

Maybe he was broken. Maybe it didn’t matter. Maybe it had never mattered to anyone but himself. He needed to track down Merope Gaunt, and the last known location was Little Hangleton.

Time to end this.

Part One: 26

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 26:

Harry knew the second he arrived at Little Hangleton that he was close.
He didn't know what it was, but he could feel it. He was some way outside of the town, and so close to Christmas, hell, it might even have been the morning's of Christmas Eve now, he didn't know, it all scrambled and meant nothing...the air was frigid with cold, and his feet stamped frost to the ground as he approached the gloomy looking village.

God, even the name sounded like it destined all of its inhabitants to be serial killers.

He pulled his coat and scarf tighter around himself. It was evening, but not unbearably late, and he could see lights. He made a beeline for the pub - and the Hanged Man? *Really?*

Any kid who grew up here had no chance of not being messed up. He entered in a swirl of cold air at his back, slamming the door shut against it. He was immediately greeted by hostile and stony faces, somehow haggard.

He wetted his lips, standing awkwardly in the doorway for a moment.

He really hoped this wasn't one of those villages that refused to talk to outsiders, and gave a tentative smile before making his way towards the bar.

He sat down, ordering a beer, and, eventually, despite the interested glances still sent frequently in his direction; the conversation swelled again as he did nothing to particularly draw attention.

He drank in silence for a while, before leaning over to get the attention of the bar tender, pulling a badge out. All of the Aurors had them, for their rare times their work led them into Muggle fields of police work.

His own badge simply said he was an officer in Scotland Yard.

"Excuse me, sir," he started politely, hoping the man would just co-operate with him because otherwise Harry wasn't at the level of patience to properly deal with the situation. He would just end up compelling the man to answer him straight. "I'm here on a follow up investigation, simply standard procedure, nothing to worry about. I believe a Gaunt family lives in this area, could you perhaps tell me about them?"

For a moment, the man just stared at him completely blankly, a bit confused and more suspicious than Harry was comfortable, before something seemed to click in his expression.

"That family's been dead a long time, officer. Good thing to, bunch of nutters they were. Real odd. Bit funny in the head, I should think."

"What happened?" Harry asked, satiated at least somewhat to finally be getting answers, to claw at Voldemort's life and history when his own already felt so exposed to the killer.

"It was quite the scandal," the man said, now with the air of relish. It was clear they didn't get strangers very often, to discuss such details with. "Of course, the men were always violent. Got sent to prison both of them, for the trouble they caused in town. Nobody missed 'em when they were gone."

"There was a girl, wasn't there?" Harry interrupted. "Merope?"

The man gave him a sideways look, before nodding after squinting a moment. Harry didn't even feel another gust of cold wind as his back as the door opened and closed again.

"Ay, that's right," the bartender said. "Merope Gaunt. The tramp's daughter, running off with the Squire's son-"

Voldemort's father, it had to be, and in that second, Harry couldn't even think to snatch up the details, to find out what happened, to try and pin down what could make someone so cool as to murder over fifty people in the course of their life, he could barely breathe. Could feel something uneasy in his gut, something wrong that made tension coil up his back.

Then he realized what it was. The entire pub had gone quiet again, just like it had when he entered. He instinctively reached for his wand, only for another hand to grab his wrist, twisting back, and for long fingers to wrap around his throat, pulling his head back where he sat.

"Riddle." He recognized the soft, velvety voice that had so often reassured him immediately, and the excited breath that pulsed against his cheek, the lips that teased the shell of his ear. "My father's name was Tom Riddle."

The second after that, everything went black.

Of course, it had been easy for Tom to dart his eyes down, to catch a glimpse of Harry's notes and scan across to see the current line of enquiry.

He was glad that Harry was so caught up in the turmoil of his own grief, because he was ashamed to say his breath stuttered when he saw the name 'Gaunt'.

He'd…never realized Harry had gotten quite that close. That he'd been *hours* away from everything he worked for being unravelled by the boy, his failure sharp on his tongue and a rabbit heart thud in his chest.

He was composed with relief a second later. Because he had the time now, the advantage, and he had a feeling he knew exactly where Harry would be going. So he let him, felt a dizzying sense of euphoria growing in his chest.

Now…now they could truly be together. Now Harry could see him properly, with no lies and glamours and touches of their mind that just weren't enough or satisfying in comparison to the unbearable need to consume and possess.

He entered the pub silently, after having stalked and shadowed Harry in his adorable eagerness to discover the truth, and let the door shut. He could have shuddered with pleasure at the moment, let it crystallize and immortalize in his mind, fingers locking tightly around Harry's wrist, feeling his pulse start to already raise on the brink of everything.

He grabbed the boy's throat, so he didn't do anything stupid, and because he loved the way those beautiful lips parted in silent cry for air. He inhaled deeply, to the smell of rain in Harry's hair and the

sweet, cloying scent of a bloody crime scene still etched below something woodsy and warm.

Everything about the boy, even now, was warm and alive. He adored it, his eyes fluttering shut for a bare second. He could practically taste Harry's fearful anticipation, feel the stiff coil of defiance of a fight he would never have the honour to allow in his shoulders and that small intake of breath as he let his teeth graze against Harry's skin.

Harry had wanted something real, and in that second he bared himself entirely.
Then he sent a stunner into his gut because this required something far more intimate than a grubby pub.

The boy went limp in his arms, a dead weight which he easily draped over his shoulder, so similarly to before. The villagers stared at him in horror, one of them starting to move, bravely, in defence.

If he had time, he would have slaughtered them all, so that this moment would forever be his and Harry's alone.

He obliviated them instead, and took his prize.

Harry felt like a shard of ice had gone straight through his gut, his mind pierced with a startling clarity. It was the same sharpness that woke him from sluggish unconsciousness.

Everything had clicked horribly into place.

Cold.

Tom was Voldemort.

Tom was Voldemort. Voldemort and Tom were the same people.

He felt sick. Clammy.

He didn't know where he was when he woke up, it was certainly no place that he had ever been before. He could feel cold restraints, entwined with magic, around his wrists and ankles holding him in – oh god.

Butterfly.

Bile clawed up on his throat, an intense fear so much worse than simply being tied up, that for a moment he couldn't think for the buzz of panic which devoured all rational thought.

The room was dark, but he managed to fix his gaze on the shadow standing by an old window. The room looked old, recently cleaned, and the sheets beneath him were nowhere near the elegance Tom demanded, though they were of an old, but rich material.

Sheets. He was tied down to a bed.
Considering T-Voldemort had kissed him, that little facet did absolutely nothing to make him feel better.

Voldemort was Tom.
Tom was Voldemort.

Rage filtered slowly, a draft through the cracks of a window.

Harry resisted the urge to swallow, tumbling through the darkness in his mind as the illusion shattered beneath his feet.

Tom Riddle had crumbled to dust, and with the yanking of the crutch, he felt himself do so too. Harry couldn't look away from the figure, it was like watching a car crash, and he remained so still that he was almost quivering on the spot. Voldemort hadn't turned to face him, his posture relaxed, but Harry knew instantly that the man knew he was awake.

Knew everything.

There was no hiding of their connection now, it was torn and blasted open, until the room was drenched and saturated with the emotions rife between them.

He could taste the sharp edges of possessiveness, the heady obsession in his gut and he didn't know if that was Voldemort's, or his own in the pictures scattered across his room and his life consumed by catching and hunting the man in front of him.

Beneath the shards of violence, was something thick and rolling far more like pleasure, which tickled his palette like the richest of dark chocolates. His mouth felt unbearably dry.

"Are you going to kill me?" Despite everything, Harry was proud to say that his voice was steady. Somehow, once he acknowledged that this was actually happening, he almost felt calmer. Oddly, he had Tom to thank for that. His psychiatrist was the one who'd put him in a pseudo practice of this.

He just wasn't so optimistic as to believe he would be tucked into bed with an expression of concern faked so sweetly on Tom's face, this time.

The Dark Wizard turned, and his expression was so jarringly pleasant that part of Harry's mind wanted to insist that this was a mistake, some twisted therapy session that had inadvertently slipped a little too far.

The emotions told him differently. They told him everything. Of love and hate, and want most of all, of a desperate need for him to understand and to model a perfect companion, no matter the cost on the person he used to be, no matter that he had to shatter Harry Potter beneath his foot to get the acquired result.

He didn't look away, and Voldemort strode lazily towards him, coming to a stop by the edge of the bed. Harry almost flinched as soft fingers reached out, tenderly caressing the side of his face.

He had a feeling the other wasn't going to answer. Swallowed.

"You lied to me. The whole time. You said you were my friend." His voice cracked, just slightly, and Tom gave him a gentle smile that splintered cruel around the edges.

"I *am* your friend, Harry."

What made Harry's head spin was the complete sincerity he could feel thrumming. Tom-Voldemort honestly thought – of course, he'd always known Voldemort had this twisted sense of saving him, of allowing him the freedom and beauty of a butterfly, but when he was staring into the face of Tom Riddle, it just scrambled nauseatingly. "There's so much that you don't know," the man continued, and there was fervour to his eyes now, a passion and excitement that clenched in Harry's throat. "So much that I couldn't tell you…"

"But it's so much easier to talk to a dead man, right?" Harry bit out, harshly, not caring if he destroyed the other's euphoric mood.

The other looked at him, flatly, expression going cold once more, soft fingers turning to claws that raked a harsh stinging line down his cheek, burning in his skin.

"You came here to find the truth…of me…and of us perhaps a little too," Voldemort murmured, moving around, his wand drawing as Harry's heart stopped. "I won't deny you. Not anymore. I can give you everything, if you let me. I'd like to."

The wand dragged across his torso, splaying his shirt to tatters on either side, exposed flesh immediately growing cool in the room.

"If you can give me everything," he near whispered. "Let me go, and put the wand down. We…can work this out, together. You and me. Tom…just trust me, like I trusted you. I can help y-"

He screamed out in agony as the other's hand clamped on his forehead, and he realized then that Tom had never touched his head like that. His cheeks, yes, but never his forehead. Not that he would have had any reason to, but…

It felt like the lightning bolt scar was aflame, in a way he'd never experienced before. His back arched against the sheets, writing, frantically trying to get away.

Then it was gone, and he was panting, chest heaving, as Voldemort looked down at him, fingers soothing down his clammy skin.

Their gazes locked, and the other twirled his wand.
"It starts…and perhaps ends, with this bed. Welcome to the Riddle House, my butterfly."

Chapter End Notes

I shall hide now.

Part One: 27

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry swallowed, thickly, breath caught somewhere in his chest as he stared up at the mad-man looming over him.

It all felt so surreal, far too fast and sudden.

He'd spent *years* of his life searching for this man, hunting him down, feeling his emotions (but-never-quite-like-this) and crawling into each other's heads, however unwillingly, that it seemed strange to have a face for Voldemort.

The real face, not those scarlet eyes and serpentine features.

It was dizzying. All too much, with the betrayal still coursing like ice in his veins, to clash with the heat of loathing and too many other things in his gut.

The Riddle House...he couldn't help but strain against his restraints some more, only for Tom to smirk, circling the bed again with the predatory slowness of a hunter that knew perfectly well his prey wasn't going anywhere.

But he knew he had to stall.

"My mother, you see," Tom started, in that velvety tone of his, as if he was just calmly discussing a point in one of their sessions. "Was a rather weak woman, who lived a wretched life. So, of course, she would fall for handsome, *muggle* Tom Riddle, the squire's son. He was everything she wanted in life, and an escape most of all."

Harry couldn't tear his eyes away, could feel the way Tom's wand tapped against his skin and the silk sheets in a way that may seem idle to a casual observer, but made Harry's blood itch with agitation and wariness.

"So, one day, when he rode past on a particularly hot afternoon, she coaxed him into accepting a glass of water from her...spiked with a love potion. They were very happy together for a while, as she kept drugging him...and then my *dear* mother found she was carrying their child." Tom's gaze seared straight into his. "One would think, wouldn't they, Harry, that parents would do anything for their child?"

The images flashed behind Harry's eyes of a Halloween a long time gone, of vacant eyes and of his mother pleading with Voldemort to spare him...and how the hell did Tom look so young when he must be so old by now if the villagers could scarcely remember the Gaunts…his stomach lurched uneasily.

"My father tossed my mother to the street the second he found out she was a witch," Tom said icily. "But you know exactly what it feels like to be called a freak for something you have no control over, don't you?"

The words ached in his chest, and he couldn't help the sympathy mixing into the turmoil of everything else.

"That doesn't excuse killing over fifty people," he said, in a quiet voice. "What did my parents do to you, Tom? Or was it just that we were happy and you were alone. I've been in your head…" he swallowed, aware that what he was doing was stupid, but unable to stop, "and honestly I've never felt more lonely. You have *no one*, and you destroy anything that has a chance of getting close so it doesn't hurt you. You need to control it and crush it and pin anything beautiful to a fucking wall because you can't *stand it."*

By the end he was all but screaming the words at Voldemort's face, and the next second the other was top of him, straddling his waist, teeth bared.

"And what about you?" Tom hissed. "A selfish little brat who can't see the gift I'm giving you. I've seen you slump into my office day after day as you let other people and your boss stomp you down and crush you into dust, when all you do is never enough for them. You have your friends, but they don't really understand, do they? They've always been whole. Loving families, loving homes and you feel almost sick knowing you'll never have that. You're so fettered by this idea that you owe the world something, because then maybe then you'll be accepted into it, that you will left people use and abuse you until there is nothing left. The difference between you and me, *dearest*, is that I have always stood up for myself and punished the people who have wronged me, whilst you make excuses for them and take their behaviour as some mark of your own freakishness. Earlier today you asked me what *you* did wrong to cause me to fixate on you, as if my actions are anything but my own and born from my own desires."

Harry stared, wide-eyed, and Tom's gaze seemed to burn, bleeding scarlet, the handsome visage twisted with a wild sort of rage and *madness* that Harry had never seen before.

"I take what I want and you ask permission-"

"Oh, just like your mother then," Harry bit out. Tom's grip tightened on his throat, squeezing, and black dots danced in his vision, his mind churning dizzy and almost euphoric because despite everything he knew that what he saw now was undeniably real. All professionalism clawed down and the other stripped bare in front of his eyes. "Gonna take what you want from me too? Got me damn well tied down to a bed."

There was a moment of screamingly loud silence, and Tom gave a rather nasty smile.

“I could, you know,” he said, softly, and Harry’s eyes widened further as the emotions started to assault his already overwhelmed mind, giving a low groan.

Images of their kiss flew through his head, coiling hot in the pit of his stomach with the heady want in Tom’s eyes and the dizzying rush of not being able to breathe properly.

It was like being hit with an aphrodisiac, suddenly he couldn’t help but feel intently aware of himself, of the way Tom’s fingers dragged like fire against his skin, and his hips weighed heavily on certain parts of his anatomy.

He swallowed, thickly.

He could feel the need building in his chest, the emotions which weren’t his in his head, but which felt like they were and he couldn’t *think* straight, his hips rolling up a little with frustrated discomfort, trousers starting to strain.

“All chemicals in the brain, Harry,” Tom smirked. “You should be careful who you show the switch board too.” The other shifted down a little, trailing the wand down his slightly straining chest. “Hold still, or this is going to hurt a lot,” was the only warning before Tom had used his wand to slice straight through the seam of his trousers, sending them to tatters just like he had his shirt.

Harry went rigidly still, disorientated, mind mimicking the grazing of his lips against his neck and snatching up the details of any such encounter he’d ever had. He couldn’t help a small groan, catching to a near-whimper in the back of his throat, eyes glazed, hips bucking up slightly and…Tom pulled back, and the feelings stopped but for the lingering echo.

“But,” Tom stressed, “I won’t, and I think it bothers you that you know that I have never forced you into anything.”

“You made me kill Crouch!” Harry struggled to re-organize his thoughts. Tom raised his brows.

“I set up the situation. The choice was yours. You could have walked away. I didn’t put any mind controlling curses on you.” Riddle let go of his throat, and he couldn’t help but cough, gasping down air. “I could have had you institutionalized under my personal care in a straightjacket; I could have spiked one of the numerous meals or drinks you’ve accepted from me with a love potion. I didn’t.”

“And you want me to be grateful that you didn’t torture me as much as you could have?” Harry croaked, but, under the surface, his mind was writhing. He knew what Tom was getting at, of course

he did. He knew from the trail of bodies he'd chased across London that mercy was not characteristic of the self-named Lord Voldemort.

The other looked set to strangle him again.

He squeezed his eyes shut, suddenly couldn't help but feel exhausted – almost thought Tom slicing him up (as he was probably intending to, seeing as he was clearing his canvass with the removal of clothes) would have been less traumatic than just bloody well talking to the man.

His eyes snapped open again at the sharp slap to his cheek, and he blinked.

"Eyes open," was all Tom said, with a twist of his lips.

Right, all the victims had opened eyes. He probably liked watching the hope leave along with life. A shudder ran down his spine, which Tom seemed to drink up and devour too.

There were few things Tom hadn't taken from him yet. He wanted to pull his arms and knees to his chest, for some semblance of warmth and comfort, but there was no chance of that, was there?

He wetted his lips, breathed out, stomped onto the buzz of panic once more.

"You never answered my question," he said, quietly. "Why did you target me and my parents?"

"Your father was an Auror, on my case though he didn't know it was mine at the time, when he started. He got too close, or rather, Lily Evans did. It was just business."

"Business?" Harry's voice cracked, and Tom's face softened, gentle fingers trailing over his skin once more.

"It's not business anymore, don't worry. You're different."

"Why?" It was a question that had circled incessantly through his mind, repeated a million times on other people's lips as they looked at him, as they tried to save him and cut themselves on the pieces, or stared at him with accusation after he told them Voldemort had killed their son or daughter or lover or mother or friend. Why.

Why did he let this happen? Why was Voldemort doing this? Why hadn't he caught him yet? What was it about him that was so wrong as to bring such violent urges in the man?

Tom's head tilted to the side in an almost reptilian fashion, and his face may have been soft but those eyes never once warmed. He wondered why he hadn't noticed that before, thought maybe he'd projected his own affections and misplaced obsession and fascination for caring.

"That's a secret for another day," Voldemort murmured, eventually. "Once I'm sure I can trust you. Suffice to say, you are my soul mate."

Harry nearly choked, brain stuttering to a halt, wide-eyed.

Oh god, the man was more deluded than he thought, though he suspected that breaking the fantasy would simply be his own destruction. He wondered if he even cared anymore, or just wanted it to be over.

Tom's gaze raked over his face, and his grip tightened slightly.
"I'm helping you," he said, once again. "I think you know that, once you get over your unnecessary moral fussing. I understand you acting like this is one sided, but I think we both know it stopped being that a long time ago."

Harry wanted fervently to deny it, to deny that anything in this was mutual, but the words ran dry in his mouth under Tom's gaze.

He remembered his own thoughts; he remembered his empty flat and the bits of his life and relationships getting swallowed up one by one. He remembered Hermione worrying about him getting in too deep with this case, and he remembered his own inability to stop.

Riddle's smile broadened.
"Exactly. Just stop fighting it. We're connected, you and I, and we always will be."

For the first time since this whole mess started, Harry let a smile cross his own lips too, and not a particularly nice one at that, taking some pleasure in how quickly Voldemort's dropped.

"What?" the man growled.

"It's funny," Harry said, almost softly. "You placed so much of your time and effort into making sure I was just as messed up as you were. I haven't had a steady girlfriend in years, my social life consists at staring at pictures of your murders and trying to think who would be next as if I could stop it. You walked into my head and rearranged the furniture as if it was your own home…" he stared at Tom, hard, when the man dared to look smug, wetted his lips. "I know I've said around you before that Voldemort just cares about me in the frame of his own desires, and this just proves it."

“What are you talking about?”

“My flat,” Harry stated.

“What about it?” the other bit out, starting to look a bit annoyed. Harry suspected he’d expected this scene to play very differently. Of course he did, he had all these ideas and expectations, pinned on a pedestal and not a real person. A fantasy Harry Potter, and maybe a fantasy relationship. It was almost normal, if not for the violence inherent.

“Has a copy of my notes, and thus leads straight here,” Harry said flatly. “Or did you not imagine swallowing up my life would mean an office to you in my flat?” Voldemort had completely frozen, and Harry gained a sick sense of satisfaction from it, grin cracking a little mad around the edges. “And I never once invited you in, because I spent so much time at your place in therapy because I couldn’t stand to spend time in my own.”

He could see Tom’s thoughts racing, spinning ahead through points and comebacks, on the thoughts of how easily a face could be changed rendering the current investigation useless for a new identity, and how Hermione Granger worried and there was probably a team already here in the time they spent talking.

The man sucked in a sharp breath, and Harry heard the tramp of footsteps on the stairs, grinning wider. It faded when Tom’s wand flicked, and a knife appeared in his hand.

Illusion shattered. Side not joined. Understanding perhaps, a painful understanding that denied unadulterated hatred, but not enough. A shard of defiance left, and a victory which soured in his mouth and didn’t feel like a triumph at all.

“Very clever, Harry,” Tom breathed, flipping off him, behind him a moment after that so Harry was stuck chained between him and the door, arms contorted backwards so much he felt like his shoulders were about to dislocate, back arched. The other pressed a kiss to his cheek, lips against his ear. “But you know this isn’t over. It’s *never* going to be over, and whilst you still have questions you’re always going to be coming to me. You know my sessions were the only time you had peace, my murders your happiness. You’re disorientated now, angry naturally, but that doesn’t change that I’m the only person who will ever truly understand you and *love* you for everything, not just the Golden Boy hero. You can make mistakes with me.”

The door slammed open.
“So let’s give you something to remember that by.”

They both knew how Voldemort made butterflies.

Harry screamed as the knife plunged straight into his gut.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: THE END (of part one.) Those of you who know Hannibal/Silence of the Lambs, might have a vague idea of what comes next. But yeah. This one was about Harry finding out Tom was Voldemort...the next, well, you'll just have to wait and see.

This chapter was stupidly difficult to write, and I had a thousand different ideas and I'm still not entirely convinced the middle bit came out as I wanted it to, but my tweaking isn't doing anything because I can't pin down what I wanted with it. I hope you managed to appreciate it anyway. If you've enjoyed this story, I'd love to hear what you thought of it!

Part 2 will probably start around the time NBC Hannibal starts again, seeing as I started this story to deal with my feelings for that show :P Don't worry, no new alerts needed, I'll just continue on from this one. But nonetheless. Hope you liked Part One of Butterfly Heart! :D

Part Two: 1

Chapter Summary

Part 2 begins.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Part 2

The first time Harry saw Rufus Scrimgeour, away from the sharp stink of disinfectant, he had absolutely no qualms about the slamming his door shut in the man's face.

It had been two years since he retired alone to a little cottage on the coast, since Voldemort was caught and every newspaper had plastered the bastard's black and white smirk across its front pages for nearly a month. Two years since he woke up in a hospital bed, with everyone clamouring to give him flowers and congratulations, and tell him he was a hero and how lucky he was to be alive.

He didn't feel lucky. Or alive.
He felt like the healers at St Mungo had made some vital error when they started him up again, forgetting to switch on everything except the most basic functions of survival.

He definitely didn't feel like hero.

He knew he wasn't, but they wouldn't believe him, and he felt even more like a fraud with the bloody visions still painted lovingly across his mind. With the cards he'd received for his birthday, for christmas, and first and foremost left on his bedside table as he blinked blearily back into pain and whiteness.

A thick, expensive card, like the type one would use for weddings - an elegant calligraphic hand which he had no chance of not recognizing, despite not having seen it that many times.

Dearest Harry, welcome back to the land of the living. You know where to find me if you have questions, and we both know you do. I look forward to seeing you again in the future. All my love, and Happy New Year - TMR.

He hadn't responded. Didn't send a note at the Birthday present he received either. Hated the way the man could follow him straight out of the Wizarding World and across the country. Sometimes he wondered which of them was really suffering in a prison.

He'd left the Wizarding World behind entirely, couldn't bear to be in it a second longer with all the speculation, all the demands, the constant whisper on everybody's lips when they saw him.

There were too many questions he didn't want to answer.

Too many questions he needed answered himself, but didn't dare to seek out.

He didn't think he had the strength to face Lord Voldemort again.

He'd devoted himself to recovery, or some illusion of it. Took up Occlumency and long walks on the beach, subsisting on the Potter family fortune in isolation. Did some painting. Some charity work, and teaching at a local muggle school, eventually.

Hermione came round, dutifully, most weekends. At first they drank too much, but as she seemed to pretend healing better than he did, and time slipped whiskey in his lips alone, and a constant awareness of the fact Ron wasn't there with them.

Maybe it would be easier if he could forget, but he couldn't, Tom had made sure of that.

Even if every second of that night wasn't seared across his mind, the thick corded skin of scar slicing straight across his belly was a constant ache.

The nurses said it was truly amazing - apparently the blade had managed to slide precisely between each internal organ it should have hit, not causing fatal injury to any of them. He knew it was no miracle, knew Voldemort had planned it so, nestling the memories between his intestines and clawing a home there just like he'd always wanted.

The thought did nothing to reassure him.
The pain pills didn't either, but he took them anyway because even after all this time, it was unbearable trying to get out of bed without them. An inch either way and it would have been impossible for him to survive until they could get him to the emergency room.

He could still hear Scrimgeour pounding on the door, and wished the man would just go away. He was done with the Ministry, and he told himself he was done with Lord Voldemort too.

He heard a sigh, couldn't help but resent it where he leaned against the door. The next second, a newspaper was shoved in. His jaw tightened. He'd avoided looking at papers after the first week.

Skeeter, the bitch, had snuck into his hospital room whilst he was unconscious, and snapped a picture of him looking so terribly small and white against the sheets. They either showed that, or pictures of Tom. From the trial, from before. He knew people were already eager to write books on the topic too.

He'd had more than his fair share of reporters hassling him for an interview.

He didn't look immediately, but eventually he glanced down at the front page.

The second after that, despising himself, he'd stood and yanked the front door open again.

Tom Riddle had never felt more bored in his life.

He hated his life here, under Smethwyck's inept care.

He could quite easily see why his butterfly hated the man. He had all the finesse of a sleaze groping for a feel in a crowded party. He had a very sticky-handed psychiatric touch.

God, he missed his office and his freedom.
But two years certainly gave him a lot of time to think. About many things, many plans for his unlimited future, of his escape, and of Harry Potter perhaps most of all.

He was sure the boy's curiosity - he could sense it burning, after all, even among the turmoil of other things and the growing sense of their connection being muffled - would have brought him here already.

The trial had dragged on for some time, considering how many of his former patients were willing to vouch for how he'd saved them, and perhaps because society as a whole both loved to think of the scandal of having such a renowned psychiatrist as a serial killer, and also hated it for the same reason. He knew their secrets, and they knew it.

If the evidence wasn't overwhelming, he could have easily gotten away with and got Harry convicted as insane.

Certainly, he'd come to the conclusion that as pretty as his butterfly was free, he deserved some time pinned to a corkboard to learn how to behave, and how it felt to be stripped of said freedom.

For now, however, he stared at the newspaper with a small smile on his face, and grinned at the terrified guard across from him.

People were always so eager to impress….
He tossed the bloodied snapshot of a crime scene to the floor.

The spoon clinked gently against the sides of the cup as he stirred in a lump of sugar. Maybe just looking for something to distract himself. He felt sick.

Scrimgeour took a sip of his own tea from across the table.
"You have a lovely home," his former employer remarked.

Harry's eyes narrowed.

"Don't pretend you're here for a social call, or the type of man to pay compliment to the interior decor. In fact, I could skip the chit chat and tell you I won't do it."

He had a horrible feeling he knew why the man was there; maybe he'd known in some sense the second Scrimgeour knocked on the door.

There was only one reason anyone knocked on his door, and he curled a hand protectively, instinctively, over his abdomen.

It didn't go unnoticed by those shrewd eyes.

"Three people are dead already," the man said quietly. "Don't pretend you don't care about that-"

"Don't try and manipulate and guilt trip me!" Harry snapped. "I've done enough."

Scrimgeour's lips thinned.

"You have a good track record with copycats, and unparalleled access and knowledge to the real thing."

Harry rubbed his eyes, feeling exhausted already.
He hated that he could see the manipulation - couldn't help but see the manipulation after Riddle - and yet got caught up in it either way. He knew he couldn't in good conscious let people die.

"Just take a look at the scene. Consult with us," Scrimgeour wheedled, leaning over the table. "If somebody is trying to get Riddle's attention-"

"-or mine."

"Excuse me?"

Harry stared at the other, hard, jaw clenched.
"I think it's probably a well known fact among the criminal world that becoming a 'Butterfly Killer,' as the papers call it, is likely to catch my attention just as much as it would Voldemort's. Actually, from track records, between the two of us it tends to lead to the copycat being killed and hunted. Voldemort doesn't exactly adhere to the view that imitation is the kindest form of flattery. He actually veers towards finding it insulting...and yet he's not angry."

"Exactly. You already know more about the case," Scrimgeour said, after a moment. "We need you. We need your help."

"And I haven't done enough?"

The man stared at him. Sometimes he thought Tom was cruelly correct when he said Harry, despite having the power to refuse and fight for himself, let people use him far too often.

It would be different this time. It would!

"I'll take a look at the scene. That's it. No more. I'm not getting in deep this time. I can't."

Scrimgeour nodded.
"Just look. That's all I ask."

Why couldn't Harry bring himself to believe that?

Chapter End Notes

A/N: So, um, I am hopeless at waiting with things I'm excited about? Sorry, I guess. That, and for those of you have followed me for a while, you'll know I have a habit of giving you an update on my birthday, no matter what...so I guess starting Butterfly Heart early is a present to myself. And don't worry, everything will be explained in time, including the immediate aftermath of the last chapter in more detail ;) Reviews would be loved as a present for tomorrow :P

(sorry if it's a bit crap, I'm swamped, but I wanted to give something)

PS: fan art is by amnrzh - http://25.media.tumblr.com/21eaed870acbce8135d877bd7415df7a/tumblr_mytzigZWoM1sh5l45o1_r1_1280.jpg

Part Two: 2

Chapter Notes

Yay for avoiding sleep and life responsibilities...

The coffee burnt the edges of Harry's mouth.

He was in the Auror Department, and what a hatefully familiar thing that was. At least, after two years, he wasn't in his old office.

Everyone was staring at him. Glancing. Offering condolences and words to mark his bravery in coming back, when such things just made him want to snarl at them.

At least Rita Skeeter hadn't found him yet.

He sifted numbly through the crime scene photos in his hand, jotting down his deductions and knowing that this amount of information wasn't necessarily enough to get anyone convicted. To stop everything from starting all over again.

It felt wrong being here, when Ron was buried six feet in the ground and not there with him.

It was pretty obvious that the killer was trying to catch his attention, Voldemort's, or even both. The murders mimicked Voldemort's in that they traced the pattern of his previous kills. The last one had been a mother, father and son.

He felt sick. Couldn't drink, but forced down cardboard cups of caffeine either way.

"I don't know what you expect me to do," he said, shoving the photos back into the file and slamming it shut so he didn't have to look. He wiped his glasses, fingers shaking as he reached for his pill bottle, dry swallowing another one. "I've written down my thoughts, but I doubt anything will help massively."

He quickly pushed the pad over to Scrimgeour, sitting across from him, and stood up.

"The main thing you need to do is find out why Voldemort isn't angry about the killings. I'd say he was just bored being locked up, but considering his reaction to Crouch and the sloppiness of the copy, and the fact that instead of forging their own path using his model of murder, they are imitating his victim list too...going from a representation of-" he squeezed his eyes shut, throat tight, "of the Potters in which I don't survive. I would say they are going through his record and 'correcting' it, finishing up the loose ends so to speak, metaphorically. That would piss Riddle off, regardless of how in need of entertainment he is."

"You think Voldemort has something to do with this? That he's orchestrating this or something?"

"Or something," Harry muttered. "I'd suggest talking to *him* either way." He caught sight of the way Scrimgeour was looking at him, and frowned. "What?"

His former boss wetted his lips.
"The thing is...we already sent someone to confer with Mr Riddle yesterday. We've offered him an upgraded view, or many of his missing privileges, in exchange for his help on the matter.."

"And?" Harry pressed, stomach lurching.

"And he is only interested in negotiating this case and everything pertaining to it with you," Scrimgeour stated.

Harry stared for a long moment, before starting to laugh. The sound was harsh and startled in his chest, as if he'd long since forgotten what a real laugh was supposed to sound like, and was now just imitating a memory.

"Yesterday. Before or after you consulted me? Tell me," his eyes gleamed with a sharp edge, "did you really bring me here just to take a look, or to get my sympathies so you can shove me in Riddle's way as bait? *Again*?"

How could he do anything but laugh in fear he would start crying if he stopped. Even now, he felt so stupidly fragile. Wrapped up with bandages of his own determination and a bottle of pills. Fragile, but he was still here. He would be an idiot to go back to the psychopath who'd sliced him up and done this to him in the first place!

Scrimgeour shifted uncomfortably, and Harry shook his head. The man's eyes narrowed.

"You must understand that this is necessary. We've tried everything. The only way he's remotely interested is if he gets to see you. Deal with you. You don't have to be active on this case, just...go and see him."

"And there you've figured out the motive and why he's not irritated by his copy cats," Harry bit out, lips pinched, turning away once more. "Now you just need to figure out how he set this up."

"Mr Potter, people are dying," Rufus said quietly.

"And that's my responsibility, is it?" Harry growled, fists clenched.

"I'm merely pointing out that you can help stop it."

"And then some other killer will come along and it will start again. People die and get hurt regardless of my best efforts. Maybe I've given up trying to save them."

Scrimgeour gave a heavy sigh.

"Obviously I can't and won't force your assistance, Potter. Just think about it. You're a good man."

So why did it feel like the universe was perpetually punishing him for some great crime?

Two weeks and another body later, Harry was standing in the lobby of the Smethwyck psychiatrist asylum.

He hated himself for caving, but not so much as he hated himself for lingering on the matter, instead of just getting it over with. His cowardice cost a life. His bravery would probably cost his own, but in

all honesty he didn't know how much of a life this was when he didn't feel like he could move on from what happened. Maybe he was just hoping to prod fate with a stick and irritate it into giving him a finishing whack. Anything had to be kinder than being suspended in his current numbness.

Maybe he was just searching for some closure. Something to make the wounds scab and scar and begin to heal, however ugly it would initially appear.

He'd been trying to move on, he really had! But...when you spent that long chasing someone, even without everything else involved, having the strings of obsession cut left a dreadful emptiness. He didn't know what to do with himself, when it felt he'd been raised to this sole purpose. The questions didn't help. The strings of unfinished conversations looped around his neck like a hangman's noose, like the silken spider webs of dreams long ago.

If he wanted to be free of all of these, he needed to be able to cut them, curiosity satisfied or released for uncertainty.

"Ah, Mr Potter!" Smethwyck beamed at him. "How nice of you to see me. Changed your mind about my off-"

"I'm here to see Riddle," he interrupted curtly.

The man's expression flickered slightly, mouth pressing sour around the edges, before clearing again.

"I see."

Harry found himself sitting in Smethwyck's office anyway. A starched, overly comfy place, with the walls lined by certificates of achievement. Family photos carefully arranged on the desk to face the guest, rather than the father of a beaming child and wife.

It wasn't unclassy, but it was very obviously designed to impress and show off the other's achievements.

"How did you do it?" Smethwyck asked him curiously. The man had just finished failing to persuade him to collaborate in writing a book on the psychology of Lord Voldemort. Apparently it would be quite the bestseller, given the recent murders and resurge in media coverage.

Harry looked at him blankly.

"How did you catch him?" the psychiatrist rephrased the question.

Harry twisted his hands in his lap, stood up stiffly, shoulders squared.

"I let him kill me. Twice. Can I see him or not? It's urgent business, or I wouldn't be here."

The doctor walked him down, watching him closely, but padded cells to hold the most dangerously insane in Wizarding Britain. Harry could hear them hooting and calling out to him as he walked down. He'd been told Riddle was right at the end. Maximum security. He was a powerful wizard, after all.

Even in a cage, nobody wanted to piss him off.

"Stay back and try not to provoke him. He killed an orderly last June when they got too close to him."

"Oh, trust me. I have no intention of doing that again." In all cases of closeness.

"He talks about you a lot, you know. Draws you. Keeps a picture of you by the bed. It's quite romantic. I always thought there was something between you."

Harry could tell that Smethwyck was just pressing for details, for some juicy confirmation of a hypothesis, but his throat went rigid.

Even if he wanted to answer that query, he wouldn't know how. He had no idea what was between them, but the one time he'd tried to kiss another mouth since he'd been unable to get the bastard's face out of his head.

So he said nothing, and started alone down the last stretch. The maximum security cells.
There was no hooting this time, no cat calls - the only sound was his own shoes clicking against the floor.

The inmates watched him with a hungry sort of *terror.*

Harry rounded the last corner, froze as he caught sight of Voldemort again. Tom looked much the same as ever - same classically handsome features, same poise. The expensive suits and robes were gone, replaced by shapeless prison clothes that hung off the other's slender form, pale from lack of sunlight.

His cell was hardly bare either. There were books, all sorts of things. The wall was littered with various drawings. Clearly Smethwyck was trying to bribe the bastard into talking to him.

Harry felt suspended in time, like he was a drawn in breath that hadn't been released yet. For a moment, he prayed Riddle wouldn't look up. That he would stay hunched over the bolted down desk, with his child's crayons. That Harry could just flee before it was too late.

Smethwyck clearly wanted to indulge Tom, but no one in their right mind would give a serial killer anything that could even remotely be turned into a weapon. It was the only reason he couldn't even crack a smile at seeing a dangerous killer drawing with crayons.

"Hello, Harry." The other had yet to look up, still, but Harry could practically *hear* the smile in his voice, an extra purr that caressed his senses. Harry's throat thickened.

.Tom's expression was blank as he finally turned, before he stood fluidly, making his way to the glass separated them. Those dark eyes gleamed. In this light, it felt like there was nothing to stop the killer from reaching out, trailing cool fingers down his cheek. But, of course, there was glass. Thick, enchanted glass that the man had no chance of stepping through.

Harry's stomach ached, and he itched to reach for his pills. Squared his shoulders instead, refusing the weakness.

"I'm here. So talk. What do you know about the current Butterfly Murders?" he demanded.

"Have we fallen so far out of civility that you don't even give me a hello after all this time?" Riddle questioned, raising his brows. "Rude."

Harry's jaw clenched, chin jutting up. He reminded himself that Tom didn't have any power anymore. Not over him, or anyone else. The bastard was in a cage, for crying out loud! If there was ever a scenario in which Harry had the advantage, this was it. He could walk away any time.

"Well?"

"I said I'd only negotiate with you," Tom murmured. "I have yet to see any negotiation." The other's head tilted as he surveyed him. "You look tired. How's the abdomen?" If anything, despite the tone, those eyes only gleamed brighter in the harsh light.

Harry felt himself stiffen, despite his best efforts.
He'd thought he'd prepared for this. He thought two years would be enough time, but it wasn't. He could tell that instantly. He let out a sharp breath, folding his arms defensively across his chest.

"What do you want?" He ignored the question. "Room with a view? Access to crime scene photographs? A walk in the garden?"

Tom looked far too leisurely, drinking in the sight of him with obvious relish.

"I see you've yet to get past the denial stage then. I would have thought two years would be enough for you to stop running from our connection. Have you considered the possibility of commitment issues?" There was an almost teasing quality to Riddle's words, balanced on a knife edge with a dangerous sort of seriousness.

Harry's jaw clenched. He kept himself calm though. Two years had gone by, things had changed.

"Have you considered that you are over-commited to the point of being a stalker?" he countered, quickly, sharply. Automatically. Voldemort laughed.

"Oh, Harry," the other man pressed against the glass. "I have missed you."

"Is that why you set up these murders? A walk down memory lane?"

Tom's brow raised.
"I'm flattered you are so convinced of my omnipotence to think I managed to escape to commit a murder, and appalled that you believe I would then come and lock myself up again after."

Harry scowled.

"So you honestly have nothing to do with all of this?" he demanded.

Riddle merely smiled back at him at that question, revealing nothing. Maybe he was just playing, clutching at the pretense of knowledge when he knew no more about the copycat then the rest of them. Harry was tempted to simply leave.

But then, it was equally possible that Voldemort knew exactly what was going on, and merely wasn't giving his leverage up so easily.

"What do you want?" he asked, again. "Spit it out, or I'll leave. I can do that. I'm not the one locked up to rot for the rest of their life."

"Aren't you? I may be the one trapped behind glass physically, but that leaves you in a prison of your own making. If you weren't, you wouldn't be here. We're linked, you and I." Tom's smile broadened. "But you're already aware of that fact."

For all the outward calmness, Harry could feel the emotions nudging and lapping at him. They'd been doing so from the second Voldemort turned to look at him. Muffled, by his own blooming Occlumency skills, but not blocked out completely.

Obsessions nuzzled against his throat, fury bit, resentful hatred burned and something suspiciously close to a delighted amusement swirled and enveloped that, and him. It was immediate. A churning mess that lunged hold of him, where Riddle's hands couldn't.

It was anything but that teasing calm; which was made the fact that Tom seemed so calm and pleasant almost so bloody terrifying. Especially as the other man had to be aware of the juxtaposition, the sick sort of disconnect.

"Don't get philosophical with me," Harry growled. He took a step back, to leave, and felt a rush of power as the emotions flickered around them. He tried not to think that his own turmoil must be equally visible for Riddle's perusal.

The situation was too charged.

"**You.**"

Harry turned again, slowly, at the words. He'd gone still again, though he'd practiced neutrality and it slotted over his features now. A numb sort of blankness perfected over the last two years.

He would not so easily have someone pick through his mind again.

"Excuse me?"

"Your holiday has dulled your mind, Harry. I want you. I always have. You know that. But to be more specific – I suppose you can call it an information trade. I will tell the Aurors information and help them with these killings…and you will resume your therapy sessions with me. Weekly, minimum."

Harry stared. Blankly.

"What?"

"You heard me."
Harry was already shaking his head, a laugh bubbling out of his chest, an edge of hysteria.

"No. No way. Absolutely not. Fuck, you're not fit to be anyone's psychiatrist, and bloody hell if you think I'd agree to let you near my head again you definitely deserved your spot in the nut house."

"Rude," Tom tsked. "And for your personal questions, as we never did finish the conversation, my bargain is that you come in my cell when you visit me."

Harry still hadn't stopped helplessly giggling. He probably sounded like he was the mad one. Maybe they were both crazy. The laughter cut at the mention of his personal questions however. His eyes narrowed.

"Yeah, no. This isn't happening. Pick something else, or get nothing."

"Well, then we're going to have a string of bodies littered across London, and we both know you're inclination to self-destructive guilt," Voldemort hummed. "You've already let the ministry drag you back to me by your bleeding heart. What harm will falling a little further bring?"

"In case you'd somehow forgotten, last time I got within touching distance of you, you bloody well disembowelled me!"

"Oh, I could never forget that," Tom purred, giving him a somewhat sharper smile this time. "I dream that beautiful scene often enough. You should have seen yourself. Was quite the work of art as you writhed against me in pain so sharp it could almost be confused for pleasure."

Harry swallowed.

"Though," Voldemort continued, "you're being rather dramatic. It was only a small cut. We both know if I really wanted to kill you, I could have bled you out on my father's bed. Femoral artery. Unconscious in thirty seconds. Dead in three. Slit your neck and you would be dead too. Could have stabbed you in the heart." Tom's eyes were hard, unforgiving, despite his continuingly pleasant tone. "You are alive because I spared you. But you already know that. It's really quite fascinating how your biggest commitment is to avoiding the inevitable. Would you like to try the next excuse?"

He'd been an idiot to come here. To think Voldemort even had a chance of helping, and not just taking delight in winding Harry in knots again. Tom didn't care if people were dying.

Then again, when he first started therapy he hadn't said anything. This time, they'd simply never get past the stage where he stared at the other man in a bitter and stony silence. Tom could be manipulative, but so could Harry.

"Fine. But first, before anything, you give me something in return. To prove you're not just exploiting me like normal. Something that will help with the investigation. Such as a name."

"If I gave you the name of the killer, you'd never come back," Riddle said.

"Time's ticking. Five seconds, or anything is void and I have a feeling you care about me staying a lot more than I care about your help."

Voldemort studied him again, head tilted to one side, before he smiled.

"You're not just looking for one person."

Harry nearly sprinted out of there.

Part Two: 3

You can't seriously be thinking of actually going in there, are you?

Harry's footsteps thudded down the corridor again, and the prisoners in maximum security continued to eye him with an unnerving and strange sort of unease.

This is madness! He'll kill you!

Tom was lying on the bed this time, serenely, staring at the ceiling of his cell. The open pages of a book rested on his stomach, face down. Harry's steps came to a clipped stop in front of the glass.

When are you going to realize his actions are not your responsibility? What do you mean more than one person? The bastard could be lying.

Harry cleared his throat.

"Hello, Harry," the dark wizard said, sounding really far too amused. "Is this not greeting me going to be a regular thing? You sound like you could use a cough drop."

"What else do you know?"

"Oh don't be so crass. Where's the foreplay, love? You know it doesn't work like this."

Yeah, but he could always have hoped. He tried not to flush at the purr in Tom's voice, either way, but he still felt the back of his neck heat up a little. Still, he refused to just tremble and stammer awkwardly at such things; because he knew Voldemort well enough that any weakness betrayed would just be prodded at without mercy.

The second he started stumbling over himself at this pseudo flirting – or hell, maybe it was actual flirting, considering the man's idea of a 'first date', such a long time ago – then the bastard would be impossible. He'd just keep pushing.

Harry couldn't help but think Tom no longer knew *how* to stop, even if he wanted to.

"I'll take that to mean you're not going for the professional psychiatrist front this time," he said flatly. Voldemort gave a low chuckle.

“Maybe. But we both know you never talked to me acting as your psychiatrist anyway. It was always more after hours, wasn’t it?” The other’s head twisted to look at him, though he didn’t shift from his position on the bed. “I thought you wanted something *real.”*

Harry’s throat bobbed.
He couldn’t bloody well believe he was doing this. Again. It felt surreal. He’d drafted this conversation in his head countless times.

“I did. Yes.”

“Or does real only count when it’s something that you want to see?” Tom raised his brows. “I’ve been thinking a lot about what you said, Harry. About fantasies and projections.”

Harry blinked; really not sure what to make of the man’s mood right now. It wasn’t one he’d seen before. But then again, before, he’d only ever interacted with the Slytherin Heir when Tom had the distinct advantage. When he didn’t know the other was Voldemort.

This was by definition something very different. Tom had been in a cage for two years, for all the indulgences allowed to him by Smethwyck. He wasn’t the King of their game anymore, he was losing. Or, at the very least, they were struggling equals however much Harry didn’t want to concede that Tom would have any power over him.

But he did. It had been three days since last time, and Harry’s mind had barely left this cell since. His hands had gone steady, instead of trembling around his pills, and there was a constant light-headedness as if he still wasn’t getting quite enough air. His heart hammered in his chest the second he saw the bastard, and kept rising and fluttering as if it was straining to get out.

It wasn’t romantic.

But there was a heightened awareness there definitely, a colour bled over their interactions by that one kiss they’d shared, and the way Tom still looked at him with such voracious hunger. Maybe he’d just never had anyone look at him like Voldemort – seeing everything, clawed into everything for all the bad that caused, too twistedly entwined, and with the man still looking at him like he was the most interesting being in the whole world.

Harry wetted his lips, shoved the thought away.

“Oh?” his voice was carefully casual. “What’s the verdict? I’m sure you’d be the first to point out that your field dictates that people with violent delusions and fantasies can snap when the delusion is broken.” He knew he’d considered that possibility in a crime scene before. And Tom had stabbed him

when things didn't go his way.

"I've decided that I find the real Harry Potter to be a far more fascinating spectacle."

Harry exhaled sharply, leaned against the glass instead of taking a seat on the chair set out for him.

"I'd say I'm flattered, but coming from you that compliment is more ominous than pleasing."

Tom hummed. In a flash he'd stood up again, and was by the glass *right in front of him.* Harry flinched back a step, startled by the sudden movement. Voldemort smirked.

"My, and for a moment you almost convinced me on your casualness, Harry. Do I frighten you?"

"I think you already know the answer to that. I'm counting this as therapy, by the way. You've been on the clock since I've arrived, so you owe me answers."

Tom studied him closely, a small smile still curling the corners of his lips.

"You've changed. Question is…what have you built your foundations on this time?" the man almost crooned the words, gaze searing straight through them. "Still so fragile, my butterfly. You've gone into a cocoon."

That particular analogy did nothing to reassure him, all things considered.

"And there was me thinking you were no longer shoving your delusions on me."

"Oh, I'm not. I've had two years to do some introspection. I see us more clearly than I've ever done, and I can see myself staring out of your eyes."

Harry shifted uncomfortably on his feet, and Tom gave a sharp grin.

"What else do you know about the Butterfly Murders? If this is anything like my old sessions, then I dare say we should be talking far more about you than me right now. Or do I know longer get to dictate our paths of conversation and what gets shared?" He gave a thin, mocking smile. Even if his flinching back from the glass had already betrayed his confidence as the mask it was.

"Ah, so you do see it as well," Tom murmured. "You always did hide from yourself the most when you knew I was right."

"The. Butterfly. Murders," Harry insisted again.

"It's an information trade. I will give you something of the same value as you give me. So far, you've yet to offer me anything. I'm just reading between the lines and taking. You, unsurprisingly, aren't."

"I'm perfectly capable of deducing you," Harry countered, very quietly.

"Yes." Tom didn't deny it, to his surprise, and their gazes locked. "But you don't want to. It's why you're acting so flippant since last time. You've decided on your approach. Two way street, Harry. I'll give you what you give me, and I'm all out of freebies."

The man stared at him for a moment longer, before giving a smile and wandering back to the bed, picking up his book.

Harry nearly gaped at him. What the hell was – oh.

Oh.

"It's funny when you're trying to power play and gain control," he said, lightly. He straightened his posture, squared his shoulders and stepped close to the glass once more. "You're going to give me what I want."

"Am I?" The amusement had vanished, and Tom's gaze turned dark. "Keep your side of the bargain then. Unless, of course, you still don't know what you want?"

Harry stiffened.

The thing was, he, for once, did know what he wanted out of this. He just had Hermione and everyone else's warnings spinning in his head. Instincts churning. Getting what he wanted most was impossible, and what he wanted second required trusting the serial killer in front of him. And so was pretty much impossible too.

He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment. Dropped that false shiny exterior he was presenting. Looking far more tired, stressed. The days were only counting down to another murder after all.

Riddle immediately put the book down, sat up and gave him his full attention.

He'd been stupid to even attempt to go at any of this like he would have done before. Before the emotions constantly circled in the air between them. Before he knew Tom was Voldemort, or to act like this was simply a negotiation with some criminal.

Things had always been more complicated than that.

"What do you want to hear? I've given you fucking everything already last time."

"Not everything," Tom said, softly.

"Right. If you had everything you would have killed me. You chase after things until you have them," Harry laughed, bitterly. "Then you destroy them because you brought it too close and you're terrified of their judgment."

Riddle scowled, eyes going dark once more, and Harry at least got some vindictive satisfaction at that. It was a comforting reminder, because, yes, they had both got far too close, suffocatingly close, and that made it so very easy for Tom to get at him. But Harry was now in a position that he could play back. He really could deduce Voldemort as well as the bastard could crawl into his own head in turn.

"You act like you're somehow better at letting people in. I attack when they do. You build a fortress to defend yourself in because it's exactly the possibility of lashing out that scares you."

And god, when had the conversation turned to this so quickly? Everything rushing forwards so immediate, like he'd been yanked in straight where they left off despite the two years that had passed.

Except…well, the years had passed but in some way they'd both remained stuck despite the blurring of time and the world around them. Harry swallowed.

"Don't suppose that counts as an offering?"

"No."

Harry watched Tom – Voldemort - Tom, warily for a while longer. He wondered if he could just cut to the chase and get a name if he gave something good enough. But…well, he also didn't quite want to bare his soul that much.

"What counts as valuable or worth more?" he asked.

"The more it means to you to tell me about it, the better a hint and piece of information I will give you in return," Tom said, simply, patient now that he was getting what he wanted. Typical.

Harry went silent, slowly sat on the chair opposite the glass. Caught himself wiping his glasses to avoid Riddle's eyes.

Well, at least it wasn't about what Tom didn't know about him. It could be something incredibly obvious…even if it was excruciating for him to admit aloud.

"I fancied you. Before. It's funny, actually," Harry murmured, still not looking at the other. "Maybe if you laid off on pushing Voldemort and being so obsessed with your need to break me or transform me, or whatever it is that you feel compelled to do, something could have come out of it. If you just… went underground. Though I suppose that would defeat the purpose for you. Acceptance for what you are, not for the kindly psychiatrist suit."

In that way, well…though it wasn't so sentimental, Voldemort was like everyone else. He wanted to be accepted for what he was, murderous monster and all, understood. Harry was under no delusion that Riddle wanted to be *liked,* but…

He looked up, to see that Tom had gone rigid on the spot, obviously not expecting him to take this angle of conversation over all others.

"You should have let Ron go the night you killed him. Could have had me instead. Felt bloody apologetic enough. Guess I mistook the want for murder in your expression as general want too."

He felt sick whenever he thought of that now, knowing how close Ron must have been. How he could have saved him, but didn't. Just slipped away into the night.

Tom was staring at him with that same look now, and Harry folded his arms.
"Your turn," he said, a little more stiffly now. "Don't suppose I get a name for that?"

The silence stretched, and Harry was once again resisting reaching for a painkiller, something, stomach starting to ache as Voldemort just looked at him, more or less unblinking. He feared the bastard would just say nothing.

“The Death Eaters.”

The scrape of his chair was too loud as he stood up.

Part Two: 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry had been working nearly nonstop again - and, honestly, it was a bit depressing how quickly he just fell back into the same patterns.

It was as if the case had never been suspended, like Voldemort was never caught.
Except he was, and there was a slight comfort to that.

Because these Death Eaters, ghastly name outside, were child's play in comparison to the real thing.

Providing, of course, that Tom wasn't completely lying through his teeth every time he offered information of case. If he was, then they weren't getting anywhere.

It would be easy if he could just say it was a group of people inspired by the Voldemort cases, the mass media coverage of the man behind it all, the hype and sick mystery and fascination.

Except most people had shown that tendency. So that really didn't narrow things down much at all.

The link between Voldemort and Death Eaters was obvious though, in the inherent preoccupation with the topic. Flight of/from death. Death Eaters. He was starting to think Tom had issues with his own mortality.

But that didn't do anything but link Tom to the matter further, and Harry had already been convinced of a connection. So, really, it didn't give him anything at all. Not until he knew more on the topic than a name.

Maybe it was people who Tom had direct contact with, followers. Which meant he would have had to have met them somewhere. Influenced them.

Harry had started subtly investigating the man's former patients.

Bellatrix Lestrange had attended rather a lot of sessions, as had Draco Malfoy. Harry would say it was Draco, if Draco was brave enough. He didn't know much about Lestrange.

But, really, Tom had been such a successful psychiatrist that it would be easier narrowing down who the bastard *hadn't* influenced, over who he had.

At least he could rule out anyone with medical training. None of the murders had Voldemort's surgical precision.

But he also couldn't rule out that at least some of them hadn't killed before.

He needed more information, really. Which was...tricky, in itself. He'd left after almost immediately after his last confession, and now...well. Tom had already known Harry fancied him. Of course he had already known. The bastard was a psychiatrist, it must have been screamingly obvious to him.

Still.

Having it heavy in the air between them felt very different to pretended ignorance and a secret tucked in his chest.

As he once more walked up an increasingly familiar row of cells, his stomach knotted. He kept his expression calm, however. Tom was at the desk again this time; not that the man had all too much choice in activities.

The chair was once again set out in front of the glass.

"It's not about the butterflies anymore."

Harry's at first surprised that Tom breaks the silence, and even more so by the comment. His brow furrowed. He wondered if he should be worried that the other man was seemingly offered up freely.

Everything Voldemort did came with a price on it.

"Different killers, of course it's not," he said, after a moment - getting the sense of fumbling to catch up with a conversation he hadn't realized had started. "They're copycats. It's tribute to you, not to the victims. Just as well. You could have probably single-handedly driven the butterfly population to extinction."

It was a feeble comment. Too feeble for Voldemort to even acknowledge it.

He'd dismiss the matter entirely, except Tom rarely spoke without thought. Actually, Harry was wondering now if he'd ever said anything so simply. Which meant this had to be going somewhere.

At least Tom wasn't quizzing him on previous romantic attachments - that was one thing.

"I'm not talking about them."

And...there it was. Harry stilled; resisted the urge to wet his lips, mouth suddenly dry for a reason he couldn't quite place.

"It's no longer about butterflies for *you*," he verified. Voldemort hummed, pivoting on the spot to face him. The bastard somehow seemed capable of making a cheap, plastic chair appear like a throne - he lounged with such magnetic confidence. "What is it about then?"

There was something different in the air today, perhaps coloured by yesterday's confession. It felt like electricity, like lightning. Crackling against his skin, sparking in his blood, searing into him like the flash of Tom's eyes.

But Voldemort has always been like that. Sometimes, especially recently, Harry can't help but think Tom Riddle is not a man so much as a force of nature somehow contained in human form.

"Come into the cell, and I'll tell you," Tom promised.

"I'm not that stupid," Harry countered. A slow smile spread across the other's lips, Voldemort's head tilting fluidly as he rose, stepping close to the glass.

"Aren't you?" the man questioned softly. Then he switched topics abruptly. "You realize that unlike with me, you're on a strict time limit with this case? There's only so many victims. Eventually they're going to come for you."

Harry let out a breath, carefully. Felt it settle against the glass opposite the press of Tom's fingers.

"Obviously."

"You're not concerned?"

"I survived you."

Tom chuckled at that comment, a rich tenor that rumbled in Harry's bones.
"Indeed," the dark wizard all but *purred*. "But you must admit I gave you some help with that feat. Do you ever wonder how much of you is you and how much is the patchwork I stitched to keep the pieces from crumbling?"

God, the bastard. Harry's eyes narrowed.

"Concerned they'll steal your victim? What if they do get me? We both know how much that would irritate you."

"Oh, I'd undoubtedly find a way to break free and come and rescue you," Tom said, far too lightly now. Harry's fists tightened at his sides, an odd swooping sensation in his stomach.

"How sweet of you."
He couldn't help but be aware of the emotions flitting between them, which saturate the air, impossible to ignore. It's only in mentioning them that he can use them then in sword and shield.

Left unspoken, Tom owned them. Just like the man owned all shadows, tucking them in his eyes and his lips and every line of his posture.

Harry had given too many concessions already to do anything but wrestle for his heart.

"Somebody has to save you."

"I can save myself, thanks," Harry bit out. Voldemort's brows arched at that comment.

"Can. Won't. Double standards, Harry. You give redemption to everybody but yourself."

"Whereas you pass judgment on and condemn everyone but yourself," he said. "Probably *because* they're not you."

"Not denying it then?" Tom mused. "That's some improvement from last time. At least you accept that the ministry are fucking you over this time."

The sudden vulgarity startled Harry, and he blinked at the madman for a moment. Swearing didn't seem to fit right in those eloquent lips.

"Yeah, we both know you'd rather be the one fucking me over."

He had some vindictive satisfaction from seeing Tom's aura flare at the comment, burning hot, before sharpening to something cold once more.

“So blunt,” the man rebuked.

“Not denying it then?” Harry parroted back, viciously. Voldemort gave a thin smile, eyes shining something strange.

“Would you want me to come for you?”

“Excuse me?”

“If they took you. Would you want me to claim back what’s *mine*?” the question rolled off Tom’s tongue like a lover’s caress. Harry could almost shudder at the feeling of it. Wasn’t sure if this could possibly come under any kind of therapy when it just felt like further trauma each time.

He felt alarmingly exposed under the other’s gaze.

“I’m not yours.”

Tom gave him a pitying look at that. The fact he obviously didn’t even feel the need to verbally respond just made it worse, all the more withering. Harry sighed, rubbed his eyes.

Felt exhausted with the knowledge was that all of this was mere cover for when he would inevitably offer up another secret, another piece of himself, for Voldemort’s answers on the case.

Not that he was incapable of doing his own investigative work, without Tom’s help.

“If they’re ‘Death Eater’s, it’s obviously not a matter of spite,” Harry continued. “They’re yours. Voldemort – Flight of or from Death. Nice thematic you’ve got there. I knew you planned this, from the start.” He’d established this already, but he said it anyway, for the purposes of watching Tom’s response.

“How could I have planned it from inside here? They check my mail.” It was an entirely reasonable reply, and Voldemort’s expression didn’t change otherwise. Flawlessly innocent.

“Most people would say the same thing about managing to kill someone from a distance, when said victim is inside a secure ministry safe room.” The thought of Petunia, or all the Dursleys really – though it was just Dudley left now – left a rotten coldness in his stomach.

“And yet here you are, still. So if it was my machination, clearly, it’s working,” Voldemort said. “Doesn’t really help you catch the killer, does it? You already knew I had knowledge on the affair. If I didn’t, you wouldn’t be here trying oh so desperately to pry the secrets from me.”

Harry had never wanted to throttle someone more.

It wasn't that the initial terror of seeing Tom again had faded, more than everything else about the man was seeping back in again too, on top of it. A messy flood of irritation, the lingering cobwebs of affection. *Everything.*

Worst of all, he could see Tom examining all of it. Relishing the taste of Harry's turmoil in his mouth.

And he was still expected by everyone to give more.

He wished so badly he could walk away, and knew in the same moment that he couldn't.
He was still staving off the inevitable, and probably offering more than he had to because of it.

But at the same time, he only had to reveal himself for case related secrets. To hear about his parents, about everything of the greatest importance to himself, all he had to do was step into that cell.

Of course, Tom could kill him. But the temptation lingered, hummed and irritated beneath his skin like an unshakeable itch. He was more than capable of defending himself. Tom couldn't even use magic in that cage.

Tom's most dangerous weapon was his words, and those were pointed whether he was inside or out. It still seemed like an idiot's move to succumb. Especially when Riddle was watching him so knowingly.

But what if this was related to the case? He didn't know.
Hermione had told him on no uncertain terms that taking this a step further was suicide. That it was appalling the Ministry were making him do this anyway, without him actually placing himself at physical risk.

"Go on," Tom urged, softly, echoing his thoughts. "Knowledge is power."

Harry swallowed.

"Stay out of my head."

"Too late for that."
Well, that was a rather blunt truth if he'd ever heard one. However unpleasant a one.

But, in comparison to spilling and talking, simply entering the cell was so *easy.* That was probably a danger in itself. Tom didn't do easy. It was funny, all the decisions here were squarely in Harry's hands, just like they had been when Tom was his actual psychiatrist, but he still didn't feel in control.

He needed something to grab some vestige of power back for himself. In this conversation. He didn't consider himself a submissive man, and having Tom pick him apart each time galled him.

"I bet you'd love to hear my side of that night," Harry said, pausing – even if he hardly had to wait for Tom's gaze to return to him. To get his attention. It hadn't left, not once, not even for a split second. "How it felt to bleed out in your arms."

Tom inhaled sharply, involuntarily. Harry nearly grinned.
Bingo.

The satisfaction faded when he realized he'd actually have to talk about it, sincerely, and not just tease. Double edged blade, just like everything between them.

He took a step closer to the glass, until they would be touching each other if it wasn't there. Kept his eyes locked on the other man's.

"This is your time," Tom said, a smirk pulling the corners of his look. It did nothing to lessen the look of sudden, desperate want in the serial killer's eyes though.

Pain, awful pain that ripped through his abdomen.

"It's all a blur," Harry started. "Fragments. I remember screaming, remember screaming like the sound was ripped from my lungs and I couldn't do a thing to stop it."

The blade sticking out of him, feeling like he was leaking, spilling over, with the knife ice-cold against the hot secluded areas between his organs. Dark and never supposed to be exposed and touched like that. The ice spread quickly as he lost blood.

"I think I stopped screaming just as quickly. Went quiet. I couldn't breathe. All the air was knocked out of me and all I could think was trying to get it back. I was in shock in seconds." He swallowed – wanted to lower his eyes, but knew that was like standing in front of a tiger and baring his throat up in offering. "It felt like I was crumbling. Splintered apart. Sort of just…melting in your hands."

He saw the door burst open as he sagged. Lost sensation in his jellied legs. Saw the horrified looks spinning in the eyes of his fellow Aurors.

"You held me in front of you. Splayed open like one of your butterflies. Completely limp. I remember hating their pity. I could see it in their faces. See the victimhood pooling up like the blood on the floor. Everything was cold – except for you."

He was vaguely aware of Tom shouting something out to them. Of lips pressed against his ear, of hands pressing against the wound and the emptiness left when the knife was wrenched out. It was a fresh flood of pain, which jarred him completely. He would have whimpered but no sound would escape him, just pants for air.

Harry smiled, mirthlessly.
"I was fading quickly. They tell me you started healing me about as quickly as you made sure it would scar. Literally wouldn't have made it to St Mungos if you hadn't utilized those surgical skills of yours. But I don't remember that part. I just remember blacking out. I was prepared to die. Didn't think for one second that I would wake up in hospital."

"You were beautiful." Tom's voice was breathless, openly reverent. Pupils completely blown. Trousers…straining.

"My god, you're getting off on this. You're fucking sick, you know that?"

Nausea rolled in his throat.

"Want to hear my side?" the dark wizard smiled, eyes gleaming.

"No."

"You were so devastatingly fragile, Harry," Tom almost crooned the words out. "In pieces in my hands. Utterly dependent on my help." All of a sudden, the feeling of being a deer in headlights was back.

"You owe me information. About the case," he said, quickly. "Something good."

"But you were the strongest I'd ever seen you, too," Tom continued, completely ignoring his words. Harry froze. He'd expected the fragile, weak comment, blah blah blah, poor victim…not this part so much. "It's the one time I've ever really seen you *fight* to survive. Your body was fighting with

everything you had. Each ragged breath a cry of your will to live. Each thump of your heart a refusal to give up. **Magnificent**."

"I know how you feel during a murder already. You make me feel it often enough." His voice sounded hoarse.

"Oh, but that's me admiring the power and beauty of death. This is me admiring you. You did the same thing the first time – just a child. Your mother was the same."

And with that, Harry was helplessly caught, frozen on baited breath.

Tom made a gesture at the door; slow and smooth, as if wary of shaking away the moment.

Harry glanced at it, took a step to enter the glass cell. Stopped.

"You owe me answers. We had a deal. Give me something substantial."

"Think, Harry," Tom scolded, eyes burning. "I give you the tools to help yourself, remember? What are these murders about?"

"They're correcting your mistakes."

"The only person I ever failed to kill was you. They're mimicking all of the murders," Voldemort countered. "*Why?* Mere tribute? What else have they done?"

Harry's brow furrowed.

"They got my attention. And yours. I still think you're orchestrating this to make me come here; I just need to figure out your accomplices," he said.

"Do you really know me to offer up my art to other people? This is plagiarism."

"Yet you're not angry. Presumably because you set it up to benefit," Harry insisted, irritably. That was what all of his investigation so far had been based on. More than one person. Death Eaters.

It was obvious, predictable – he just needed their names.

"You're thinking too obviously," Tom murmured. "You're applying assumptions because you know the end result of coming here, without taking into consideration that you don't know all the facts." Harry stared at the other man, blankly. He had no idea what Voldemort was trying to tell him.

"Just spit it out. You promised answers, not more riddles."

The other's lips quirked at the phrasing, but those eyes said something else entirely.

“My poor butterfly, you really are out of touch. This isn’t a tribute. This isn’t finishing what I didn’t to honour me. This is a *challenge.”*

Harry’s eyes widened.

“A…challenge. To me or to you? Or both of us? Do you know who’s behind this? If they’re challenging you, why don’t you just tell me so-”

“Harry. I already told you what the end point of this really was. And it’s not me getting to come here, however much you still keep that in your head,” Riddle hissed. Suddenly, Harry was startlingly aware that the emotions around them had changed again. But this time it wasn’t in the way of Voldemort *trying* to show them to him. They were just there.

He thought back.
“You said eventually they were going to come for me.”

“And yet despite your mocking me on the matter, it didn’t click to you that I would not be willing to share you?” Oh god. He’d been so stupid. “If I’m in a position to manipulate you, of course I’ll do it,” Tom continued. “But you said it yourself once; Voldemort doesn’t just have one motivation for anything. This is byproduct, nothing more.”

Harry was getting a bizarre urge to laugh. A horrible, hysterical laugh.

“Oh my god…you’re trying to save my life.”

Chapter End Notes

http://8tracks.com/rustamandthewhitedemon/butterfly-heart

Part Two: 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

If the Death Eaters were trying to kill him, the only reason for Voldemort to get involved and help - even in such a manipulative way - was to try and help him. To save him.

And, Harry supposed, if he spent his days here, in a maximum security setting, he was far less likely to get attacked on the street.

Of course, it was more possessive than altruistic, but it still surprised him that Tom would bother.

It was funny how he felt he could know the man so well, and yet he managed to bewilder him each time, constantly surprising him.

Voldemort remained pressed against the glass, dark eyes searing into him. Drinking in his every reaction; the hum of his messy thoughts, devouring them like delicacies.

He still couldn't believe Tom was in anyway trying to save him, though he knew it to be true. He supposed, in a twisted way, in his own mind, that was what Voldemort was always trying to do.

"You know, this would go a lot easier if you told me who was challenging you," Harry murmured. "Then I could just avoid them, have them arrested."

"It's not quite that simple."

"What, because then I'd have no reason to come here anymore?" Harry's brows arched. "Won't come here if I'm dead, either."

"That's one reason. There are others."

“And yet you feel no urge to gloat upon these other reasons?” he asked. Tom’s lips thinned slightly, but there was still that odd shine to his eyes.

“You have yet to fulfil the other stipulation of our deal that would allow me to,” the man said. Harry frowned, before his eyes widened slightly.

The other stipulation was stepping into the cage...but that was to answer his more personal questions. Not case questions. He wetted his lips, about to growl something furious.

That look in Tom’s eyes gave him pause again.

Because if this case required both stipulations of their deal fulfilled, it indicated something rather personal to both of them. Whatever was going on here, was intimately entwined in their history, and in the situation.

His mouth had gone dry.

But why would the Death Eaters do that? Because Voldemort would supposedly control them? Because Harry himself was the reason they would rebel against their leader?

He had no idea.

It made no sense that the Death Eaters, if they truly were in anyway followers of the man, would challenge and betray him. Were they disenchanted?

Or were they really just trying to honour the man, not challenge him, and Voldemort was just making all of this far more complicated than it had to be?

His mouth soured as he realized how effectively Tom once again had him trapped. Sure, the bastard gave him information, but not without fully demanding payment for each word.

He tried to see some other way around this. Some further evasion.

Riddle continued to stare at him, barely blinking - that strange smile curling the corners of his lips.

Harry could feel a dark, hot tension in his stomach.

Drew in a shuddering inhalation of air.

God, he couldn't believe he was doing this.

"Step back, against the wall," he ordered, curtly. "Guards!" After a minute, one of the security team approached him.

"Mr Potter?"

"I want to enter the cell. Can you open the door for me, and lock it behind me after? I'll tap when I wish to be-"

"-I'm afraid that won't be possible."

"Make it possible," Harry said, expression hardening.

The guard glanced uncertainly at the glass cell. Tom was leaning lazily against the opposite wall now, though there was a definite hint of amusement in his expression.

"He's dangerous."

"You think I don't know that better than anyone?" Harry scowled. "I'm dangerous. I can handle myself. He won't harm me."

“...didn’t he stab you?”

“He won’t harm me,” Harry repeated, with an utmost confidence that he really didn’t feel. Tom’s smile didn’t broaden, but Harry could feel the man’s emotions washing over him, caressing his senses.

He felt sick.

“He could escape.”

“This is of the greatest importance. What, you think I’m here for kicks? As you said, he stabbed me.”

“You’ll need to talk to Healer Smethwyck. I’m sorry.”

Fantastic, just great. He gave Tom a look of absolute loathing.

“The how isn’t my problem,” the Dark Wizard said in a far too innocent tone.

“Well, it’s not mine!” Harry growled. “Suck up to him. Help him write his damn book.”

“Or you could,” Tom shrugged.

“Yeah, but unlike you, I have better things to do,” Harry replied. Tom’s eyes darkened, narrowing. Harry smirked, refusing to feel intimidated. At least, refusing to show it.

Still, after a moment, he wetted his lips, stepping closer to the glass to be less easily overheard. He couldn’t believe he was doing this either. Riddle’s head tilted curiously, before he too had stepped forward with a few smooth strides, up against the glass once more.

“Yes?” it was soft.

“You said you wanted to help me. Save my life. So decide - are you working with me or not here?”

Tom stared at him. The air crackled.

Harry waited.

Tom Riddle was very much enjoying his new lease of life.

Of course, the world was not how he expected to find it - not by a long shot. He was not the ruler of the Wizarding World, and Voldemort had no legacy as a Dark Lord.

Instead he was...a petty serial killer. A psychiatrist. It was a disgusting waste of politics and dominion, and all which he had once hoped to find for his future.

He didn’t understand how this had happened. Whilst he could admit that the murders themselves were elegantly done, it was a disappointing view of what he’d thought to be such a bright future.

They’d ensured immortality, and then he ruined that with playing caretaker to somebody else’s problems? Surely someone with true power wouldn’t need to spend all day listening to other people whine.

He’d thought he could stop doing that when he left Hogwarts.

And then there was the matter of Harry Potter.

From his research in the last year, the boy had defeated him - twice.

It was appalling that the boy was still alive; failure once could be put down to unfortunate circumstances, failure twice and he was wondering if there wasn't something more going on.

(If he could call Potter a boy, anyway, when technically in all physicality they were the same age, extenuating circumstances disregarded.)

It was...interesting, to say the least, and he couldn't help but wonder why his other self was so obsessed with this Harry. He would find out. He would correct, and conquer, and then surpass.

He would do it right, not end up locked up in an asylum like a common criminal.

But first, he could play a bit too.

The Death Eaters were still there, after all, and with all their desperate needs for reassurance and power and a leader, they were so easily controlled. Sheep to be led, and he the piper to draw them all to a new future.

His future.

He'd spent a year adjusting, learning, growing...

And he was not a disgrace to the name Lord Voldemort.

Smethwyck sat on the other side of the desk, watching Harry Potter with a clinical sort of curiosity.

The boy aggravated him and mystified him in equal turn. Even as a child, he'd been utterly resistant to psychiatric care.

Of course, he hadn't managed to even offer his help until the boy was eleven.

He'd grown up with those relatives of his, hidden from the wizarding world by Albus Dumbledore.

By then, it was clear the damage was to some extent already done. He was an uncannily independent child. Very untrusting, too, in his way - certainly of any mind healers, touchy on the subject of 'freakishness' and adamant that there was nothing wrong with him.

He sat, so small and fragile looking, on the other side of the desk.

He was amazed the boy wasn't a drooling mess yet - didn't know how someone like Harry Potter proved to be a match for a mind as strong as Tom Riddle's.

He'd always admired and envied the killer's psychiatric skills. He was surging ahead in the field. But at the same time, he'd always wished it would be him as the famous psychiatrist. The one whose services everybody coveted.

Even now, exposed as a madman, Riddle held sway over the public eye. Now, he was a disgrace to the field. People trusted Psychiatrists less, now that they knew of Voldemort.

And yet, now Riddle offered him a ticket to psychiatric success. He and Potter had some of the most fascinating minds, and seemingly connections, of their time. And they were both hot topics. Any book written on them would be an immediate bestseller.

He'd be a fool to let the opportunity slip, when it could offer so much illumination, and he had the resources so close at hand.

"You….wish to enter the cell with him?"

"Yes," Potter said.

It was laughable. Honestly laughable. And dangerous, incredibly risky. He didn't want to be responsible for letting a psychotic murderer loose on the world again.

"And why would I ever agree to this?"

Harry wetted his lips, biting down, staring at him from under his fringe, eyes big and wide.

"I thought you wanted to help me?"

"I do," he said, after a moment. "But I don't think further exposure to Tom Riddle will do your health any good."

"No, but it might do your book good." Just as quickly, the innocent, lost expression had vanished. "Seeing me and Voldemort interacting. Surely enough to draw a few...interesting conclusions."

He stared at the boy...no, not boy. He was slyer than he would let people believe. Suddenly, just for a split second he could see exactly how Harry Potter managed to catch Lord Voldemort. Suddenly, he remembered all the old worries the public had about Potter being Voldemort's mouthpiece.

And yet, it was a tantalizing deal. And it was the boy's stupid fault if he wanted to risk his life. It had to be something important, and so...if he could find out what it was...probably linked to the recent Butterfly Killings...well, he could make quite the sweet packet on this.

"I see no reason, not. With some supervision."

Harry gave him a bright smile.

Harry still wanted to back out. He'd spent an hour in the office with Smethwyck, being polite and to some extent sucking up to the man.

God, if he didn't hate Riddle for being Voldemort, he could hate him for this. Of course, Tom was the one who'd given him tips on what to say and how to play the Healer.

Everything was happening so fast. He wasn't ready for the possibility of physical contact…he was barely ready to even talk to the bastard!

He swallowed thickly.

Voldemort had retreated to the back of the cell again, somehow managing to seem thoroughly smug, despite having his back to the door and his hands above his head.

Harry steeled his shoulders. Stepped in. The door was locked behind him.

Tom turned.

It was obvious that Potter was preoccupied with the killings he'd orchestrated - or at least had the Death Eaters perform. They were sloppy, sloppy enough to rile up his former self, and enough that no one would suspect his true genius.

Not yet, anyway.
The Death Eaters remained easy to manipulate. They thought they were honouring Voldemort, playing tribute. He knew better, and he knew his other self would see better too.

Whether Potter was, was a testament to his intelligence, but personally he was skeptical.

But Harry did seem to have a certain...charm. Though he was a wreck of a man now, so maybe that was why it was difficult to see.

Almost dead, and yet still limping on. Stitched together with painkillers and bravado.

He half thought the only reason to even bother with Potter was because he knew it would aggravate his true target, and because it was a sign of his strength to kill where his counterpart failed.

And maybe he was curious.

The gold locket was heavy around his neck as he went to visit a certain Miss Lestrange.

Harry stared at Tom for one breathless moment, horribly aware of the fact that there was no glass separating them now.

He hadn't brought his wand in - couldn't risk Riddle getting his hands on it. He nearly shrank back as the other immediately approached him, eyes bright and almost reverent.

Almost. If reverence could be sacrilegious and obscene. His shoulders stiffened. Then Tom was right in front of him, breath puffing gently over his face.

The guards were shifting uneasily - everyone watching every scrap of movement, waiting for bloodshed.

Harry's shoulders squared.

Tom's hand came out, fingers all but trembling. Harry's eyes nearly flinched shut as the man's hand stroked over the side of his cheek.

He wetted his lips.

"You promised me answers." His voice was softer than it should have been, and he cleared his throat. Took a step back only to press against glass. His head moved to jerk away from Tom's touch.

"Don't," the dark wizard murmured, just as he was about to move. Eyes boring into him.

Harry could feel his pulse racing in his ears. The other hand came up, so Tom's hands cupped his face. He felt frozen on the spot. Stared back.

His own hand srose, gripping Riddle's wrists, warningly. He swallowed.

"Don't," he murmured back, in the same tone. "Answers, now."

The man's eyes were heavy lidded.

It was strange being in a room with Voldemort, he suddenly realized, without feeling that intoxicating magic around him. That overwhelming power.

The emotions were there, but in this cage magic was stripped back.

It was a credit to Riddle that he could seem intimidating at all.

And Harry was very good at muggle fighting. It gave him a surge of confidence, and he stepped forward, forcing Tom back away from the front of the cell, so long as the man kept holding onto him.

And he didn’t think Tom had any intention of losing physical contact any time soon. The man was practically quivering already, probably even more so in light of their previous conversations.

He wondered how long it had been since Tom held someone, now. Two years? One? Weeks?

Harry wasn’t the psychiatrist here, but it was obvious the Dark Wizard was touch starved.

He almost felt sorry for the bastard.

Slowly, Riddle’s lips spread into another smile, and the hands dragged down, over his neck and finally settling with hands on his hips.

“You really want to know who’s issuing a challenge?”

“Obviously,” Harry said, tightly, skin itching with being this close.

Tom lips ghosted over his own, then against his ear.

“Then get rid of our audience.”

Just one bloody thing after another.

Chapter End Notes

So, I don't really like this chapter. I've been writing it and re-writing it, but it just won't seem to jazz right. I'll get stuck if I don't post it, and I wanted to give y'all something for Christmas (even if this is a bit late, and not very Christmassy.) So...yeah.

Part Two: 6

“And how exactly do you want me to do that?” Harry almost hissed out the words. “Supervision is the only reason I’m even allowed in a cell with you - which, frankly, I agree with. I rather like witnesses.”

He couldn’t decide if this is worse than Voldemort and Tom toying with him, when he still thought of them as separate people.

He thought it might be. At least, before, Tom had been an illusion of comfort - something he could clutch hold of when everything else seemed fluid and lost to storm.

Now...now there was nothing to hold onto. The bastard had torn all of his normal footholds away and fashioned them into weapons against him a long time ago.

“Are you scared of what will happen if you’re alone with me?” Riddle purred. The hands on his waist twisted a little, thumb dipping lower. Harry gave the man’s wrist another warning squeeze, tight enough that the bones almost creaked together.

“Well, you did stab me last time.”

Tom’s eyes gleamed.

“They say it’s a psychopath’s sex.” Harry nearly choked at that, as Riddle continued, arms wrapping around in one quick movement to pull him flush, hips pressing forwards. “Long, pointy object. Stab it in and out, penetration. Lots of fluids involved.”

“Normally used to overcompensate or when the killer is impotent,” Harry interrupted. “Are you trying to tell me something?”

“Well, we both know I’m not impotent. But I can prove it for your criminological assessment if it pleases you?”

“It wouldn’t.”

“And there was me thinking you fancied me.”

Considering everything, and the overwhelming sensation of Voldemort being this close to him after last time, this would have been difficult enough without an audience. With an audience, he just felt uncomfortable. Uncomfortable and a little dizzy.

Smethwyck's eyes had no doubt lit up at that comment. Harry could just imagine a whole chapter dedicated to the romantic fucking tension or something awful.

Even if the whole thing wasn't lies and garbled comments completely misunderstood without context, even if Smethwyck was right about everything he wrote, and not just misrepresenting him like Skeeter had done, he didn't like the thought.

Private lives and feelings should remain exactly that. His jaw clenched.

Riddle was already continuing once more, one hand on his cheek again, eyes intent upon his own.

"I've been thinking a lot, in the last year, which one would be more lovely," Tom murmured. "You screaming out in pain and fighting for life as I plunged a knife into your belly." Harry sucked in a sharp, startled breath as Riddle's hand crept, fast as a viper, beneath his shirt, stroking over the wound.

He started to take a step back, but the hand on his cheek was almost instantly gripping the back of his neck.

"I don't think that's a very lovely offer in any form. Perhaps you'd like me to do it to you and see if it changes your opinion on the matter?" Harry spat. Then maybe Riddle could find out how fun physical therapy was.

God, was Tom even planning to tell him anything of substance? Though their audience were still gawping so he supposed there was no chance whilst they were there.

Security, what a joke. Voldemort was practically mauling him, and they were just standing there watching.

"The other option then." He received a sharp grin.

“You’re a prisoner. You don’t get to do experiments,” Harry bit out.

“You’d enjoy it. I’d make sure of that.” Tom’s fingers pressed into wound tightly where they’d been previously featherlight and caresssing, even with Harry’s hand yanking at his wrist and twisting it to get him off. He immediately gave a cry of pain, and Riddle took the opportunity to slam him back against the glass at the front of the cell. “Don’t you want to hear?”

“No.”

“Healer Smethwyck does, doesn’t he?” Tom glanced over his shoulder, pressed a knee between his legs. Gave his wounds another sharp stab with his fingers when he squirmed.

Smethwyck’s eyes were wide. Harry could tell immediately he’d never seen Riddle like this - eyes aglow with want and determination, every inch of his not inconsiderable willpower in full, ruthless show. And somewhat terrifying for the smile on his lips.

Smethwyck knew Voldemort when he was trapped in a cage like a lab rat, or a tiger in the zoo. More or less powerless and without any leverage except pieces of his own mind and identity. Harry knew him in full power, with London as his court.

“Get off him,” the Healer ordered. “You know you don’t really want to harm him.”

Well, Harry supposed at least the bastard defended him. Even if he was wrong. Hell, he was so wrong he couldn’t believe he actually exchanged a disbelieving glance with Voldemort on the matter.

Out of everything, the fact that Riddle would always want to hurt him was one of the thing he would always be certain of. Whether the man acted on that sadistic desire, and whether it was in a murderous way or more in simple fascination of how Harry would react was where the variation came from. And whether something else outweighed want for pain.

But the sadistic element was always going to be there. Thrumming like an itch. Harry almost wanted to laugh. A bit hysterically.

“No, no you’re right, healer,” Tom said solemnly. “Stabbing him was a mistake. I repent. I never want to see him hurt.” The hand left his stomach, tightened on his shoulder. “The other option was having him panting and writhing with want and pleading for my every touch, until he can’t think of anything else but that and pleasure. Would you prefer to watch that one?”

Harry would forever deny the not-repulsed shudder that ran down his spine. He couldn't see Smethwyck, with his back pressed against the glass, but he could imagine he and the guards had flushed scarlet.

"We need to get him out," the Guard from earlier hissed.

"We can't," Smethwyck snapped, starting to...actually look a bit panicked from what Harry could see when he twisted his head. "Riddle's too near the glass. He'd escape."

Probably planned this. He could see the thought go through their heads, and found it ironically truthful.

He just didn't know to which extent or level Tom's plans went, or how far they stretched.

God, Harry felt like an idiot. Worse, he'd actually expected something like this to happen. Tom was right. He cared about people and the victims far too much - and it never did him any good.

Even if the Dark Wizard's hand was no longer digging painfully into his stomach wounds, his knee still pressed warningly between his legs whenever he tried to shift and squirm too much.

Harry could feel his heart hammering in his chest, nausea in his throat.

He didn't know what to do. He'd known what he was getting into, but that didn't make it easier. He just knew this was better than the killer escaping.

"Oh, so you actually are going to watch?" Voldemort raised his brows to Smethwyck over Harry's shoulder. "My, my, you surprise me. And there was me thinking you wouldn't want to traumatize my dear butterfly further." The man gave a rather nasty grin. "For all your nosiness."

"Get a sedative and a team," Smethwyck ordered, tightly, to the guard. Tom's grip tightened on him to a rather painful, possessive level.

"I could kill him before you did that. So maybe just offer up some dignity instead of forcing me to harm him?" The words were mocking, and Riddle's eyes were gleaming.

There was a stretch of silence.

"Oh, look," Tom purred. "They're walking away and leaving you. Sacrificial lamb again, aren't we, Harry? People just keep throwing you at me. You should do something about that."

His stomach ached. Obviously, he was going to fight back. Tom was going to have to shift the current press of his knee at some point, and the second he did Harry would have the upperhand.

Sure, his stomach wound was an easily exploited weakness - but he was still the better fighter.

The sound of footsteps receded to nothing, and he heard a door clang down the corridor. Could imagine them whispering.

“You’re a fucking bastard,” he hissed, at Tom. “If you think for one second-”

“I got them to leave, did I not?”

Harry froze.

“What?”

Tom dragged him forward, only to shove him towards the bed.

“They left. We have a cover. You’re welcome. They won’t be checking the cameras any time soon either. They would feel too creepy. By the time they do, it will be too late.”

Harry’s head was spinning. It was all just a trick. Another act.

“You’re unbelievable. You fucking twat.”

Tom gave him a suddenly icy look.

“I have already indicated my distaste for rape to you,” the other man said. “Maybe you should lecture me less about my delusions towards you, and consider your bias towards me. I have never shown anything but class in my crimes. You used to be far more flattering about them. Clearly separation coupled with sloppy mimicry has allowed you to paint me as the source of all evil in the world.”

Oh god. He’d actually seriously offended Tom. He could feel it like a whip in the air. He stared, wide-eyed. His mouth had gone dry. His brow furrowed.

He supposed, in a way, it was true. He constantly expected the worst out of the other, even in the things he had shown no inclination to. Tom had pointed his adherence to choice over force before. At the Riddle House.

Oh, it wasn't morality, Harry knew that. It was quite simply that he didn't find brute force to be suitably clever when he could manipulate events instead. At least, when it came to Harry and butterflies.

"Forgive me the defense mechanism," he said, stiffly. "But you can't seriously blame me for expecting and preparing for the worst from you, considering everything you've done. Considering the fact you had me slammed up against a wall."

"Everything I've done by turning the ugly into art?"

"I refuse to get into a debate with you over your ideologies on the world," Harry bit out. "You know why I'm here."

"My ideology on the world might teach you some manners. Two years and I forgot how much of an ungrateful, whiny brat you could be," Tom hissed. "How the heart grows fond in absence."

"Ungrateful?" Harry's eyes flashed. "Oh, right yeah. Thanks for killing my parents. My childhood was fucking swell. Oh, and thanks for killing my best friend. And for the nightmares - mustn't forget about those. Of course, thanks for stabbing me. You're absolutely right, that was lovely. So was the intensive physical therapy I had to go through and the way people now look at me and think of nothing but you. Thanks for making everyone think you're going to rape me so now that will be even worse-"

"-You forgot to thank me for not actually doing it." Voldemort picked as his nails with faux casualness.

"I shouldn't have to."

"That which does not kill us, makes us stronger. Friedrich Nietzsche."

"Say that after having your legs amputated," Harry snapped. "Bullshit. You weren't trying to make me stronger. You were trying to break me into a million little pieces and make me up again in your image."

"Yes," Tom said. "Stronger. And considering I'm not joking when I say you're still playing sacrificial lamb, would you like me to take another shot at it?"

Harry's mouth soured at that comment.

"...Just tell me who's behind the killings. You promised answers."

“And then what?” Riddle asked. “When you have your answers...what will you do? Run back to the ministry who offered you up to me on a platter? Expect them to look after you and make sure you’re protected and feeling safe? Funny, last time I checked, the only one who had any success with that endeavour was me.”

“Just shut up,” Harry hissed, fists clenching. He nearly surged up from where he was sitting on the bed, agitated.

Tom’s legs sprawled lazily on his lap - and for all that he’d returned to a nonchalant, nonthreatening posture, that danger will still radiating off him. Sparking in his eyes, like a dark nebula.

“Another thing Nietzsche said, was that ‘we often refuse to accept an idea merely because the tone of voice in which it has been expressed is unsympathetic to us. Interesting, no?”

“If I was so much of a - a weak sacrificial lamb and a pushover who lets myself get bullied and pushed around as you seem to think and suggest, I dare say you would have won by now.”

“Oh, I don’t think you’re weak. If I did, I would have killed you by now,” Voldemort drawled. “That’s the infuriating part. You have strength, but you refuse to use it to defend yourself where you can.”

“Seem to be doing okay not being a pushover now,” Harry growled.

“Is that why you’re here when you obviously don’t want to be? Not being a pushover?”

“Just because I don’t want to be here, didn’t mean I didn’t choose to be,” he said.

“Yes, because other people manipulated you and pushed you into it. Myself included,” Voldemort said shamelessly. Harry’s eyes narrowed.

“I’m here because unlike some people, I have a conscience and have am not a complete self-serving bastard. It was my choice.”

“Conscience is merely a pretty way of referring to societies current standards of acceptable behaviour. Morality, among other rhetoric, is a tool of masters to control and subjugate those below them. No true power was ever gained through niceness, which is why they say that power corrupts. Telling you it’s your fault if victims die is a way for the ministry to exploit you and get you to run along like a good little sheep.”

“Oh yes, and your rhetoric and words are completely altruistic and not manipulative at all,” Harry said sarcastically. “Almost everything in the world can be manipulated. Awful convenient for you to pick on morality as your example. Yes, morality is subjective - that does not decrease its individual validness, so piss off. I told you, I’m not getting into this discussion with you. Give me my answers, or I’ll take you as a liar, leave, and never come back.”

Riddle’s eyes were still dark, as the other watched him closely.

“I will require a secrecy oath.”

“Now you’re just making me jump through pointless hoops,” Harry snarled, livid. This time, he did stand up. Tom had grabbed his arm in a flash, and Harry swung for his face.

It connected with a sickening crack; blood starting to trickle out Voldemort’s nose.

For a second, neither of them even seemed to breathe.

“It has to do with the reason I told you that you were my soulmate,” Tom hissed. “It has to do with the night I killed my parents. Why you can speak Parseltongue. Why our minds are connected. I’m sure you can understand that the information might be sensitive.”

Harry swallowed, fingers flexing.

This was turning out to be far more complicated than even he had anticipated - and he’d expected it to be a bit like trying to draw water from a stone.

He studied Tom warily - searching for a catch. Merlin, he just felt exhausted. Drained.

“If I take a secrecy ward, I can’t get help on the case or report my findings.”

He rubbed a hand over his eyes, shoulders sagging.

“You have my help.”

“You’re in a cell. It’s not going to help me much, no offence.”

“If you don’t want to know, you can walk straight out again,” Tom said, sitting down again. “I’m tempted to let you do it, right now.”

Harry shot him a look.

“I don’t think you’re the one with a right to a grudge here.”

“No? You think being stabbed is anywhere near as painful as having Smethwyck trying to be your psychiatrist every day and every day out?”

“He does try and be my psychiatrist every day and every day out,” Harry grumbled.

“It’s boring in a cell.”

“You brought it upon yourself by getting caught and becoming a serial killer. You could have stayed out of the way. It’s not my fault you got cocky and too close.”

“Actually,” Riddle said. “It’s exactly your fault that I got too close.”

Harry sighed, didn’t even bother with another response.

“Is there anything that you can give me without a security oath or was this all a waste of time?”

“The Death Eaters aren’t the threat. The man in charge of them is,” Tom smirked.

Harry scowled.

“So you are behind this?”

“I’m stuck in here, am I not?”

“You’re lieutenant or something?”

“Or something,” Voldemort hummed. “You really should take that secrecy ward. It might save your life.”

“It might condemn my life because it forces me to do this alone.”

Tom laughed. It wasn’t a nice one.

“Oh yes, because you’re so prone to asking for help normally. Being your psychiatrist was like dragging you along kicking and screaming.”

“Probably just as well, seeing as you weren’t exactly on my side,” Harry growled. Tom blinked, gave him a strange smile.

“Actually, I was very professional. I didn’t compromise myself, obviously, but I didn’t particularly abuse my power. I just kept an eye on progress. You were happier with me after hours talking and solving the case than you were anything else. You invited me to be your plus one.”

“That was a very long time ago,” Harry said, softly. “Things change.”

“Not everything has to,” Tom countered.

“I was an idiot.”

“I’m a very good actor. The board has never been set in your favour, of course it wasn’t. You were a child. I had all the time in the world to manipulate the pieces.”

Harry’s brow furrowed suspiciously at the acknowledgement. The almost niceness.

“And is all of this something you manipulated?”

“In a round-about-manner of speaking. Have you ever read Frankenstein? Interesting read.”

Harry’s head tilted. Frankenstein? Frankenstein’s creation turned on him. Harry gaped.

“Oh my god, you don’t have a kid do you?”
He couldn’t picture it. Then again, he supposed Tom had to be older than he looked considering nobody remembered the story of the Gaunts so well.

He wetted his lips. Wondered if that had anything to do with this.

“No. I’m insulted that I reference a monstrous lab experiment and you immediately think of that.” He didn’t look angry. He didn’t feel angry either. Harry snorted.

“Your mood swings give me whiplash,” he mumbled. Riddle looked utterly unrepentant about that fact, gaze still fixed on him. Harry’s mind turned the world over.

“So you’ve created something. And whatever it is, is the challenge. Are you going to give me a hint at species or gender or-?”

“You’ll recognize them when they see him. And I imagine you’ll be seeing him soon.”

“...considering you don’t like being challenged, you suddenly seem far too amused.” Harry’s gut lurched.

“Oh, I don’t appreciate the challenge,” Riddle shrugged. “But I am very bored and you two meeting is bound to be fascinating. Do try not to die or get kidnapped though. I’d love to hear your thoughts. “

Well, this had taken a turn, hadn’t it.

“You are maddeningly unhelpful, considering your promises.”

“I’ve given you everything you need to slot some of the clues together, with a little research,” Tom countered. “I won’t give you more without a secrecy ward.”

“Then I guess I won’t see you here again then. Enjoy life in prison,” Harry snapped. He turned to leave, only to yelp as Voldemort all but pounced on him. Twisted instinctively to fight, and found the second he had turned to face the other with a sharp elbow jab to the ribs as he did so, that lips crushed on his own.

Tom’s hands clamped on the side of his face, to hold him still. Mouth hot and claiming, lips bruising and teeth biting. Harry couldn’t breathe under the onslaught.

Not even a minute later, Riddle pulled back, licking his lips.

“What the hell?” Harry demanded, mind spinning. Voldemort ruffled his hair too, and gave his cheek a small slap. Ignoring him completely, before stepping back.

“There. Now you look the part.”

“The part?” Oh, the cover. Fuck. Harry glared and immediately tried to smooth down his hair. “They’re going to check the cameras. The ‘part’ is not necessary.”

“Okay, but it was rather enjoyable. And you look ravishing. It will help you if he attacks you tonight, trust me.”

All in all, this had been useless and far too stressful.

“Oh, so he’s as much of a perv as you are? Lucky me. Don’t suppose he’s at least better looking?”

The man’s eyes and emotions darkened. Harry gave him a slightly spiteful smile.

“I should let you die.”

“You won’t.”
Harry didn’t know what made him say it, but Riddle went still - staring at him.

“...I’ll see you by the end of the week.”

Part Two: 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Simplifying the whole matter down to fear would have been easy.

It would have been simple to say that he hated Voldemort for everything he'd done, and indeed it was true.

But, even now, even with his heart pounding dizzyingly in his chest, he couldn't shake off everything else. He was, to his own reluctant admission, drawn to Tom. To Voldemort.

The man had fascinated him from the start, just as much as he horrified him. He'd always understood too well and too clearly, for rational views on the matter.

He could remember too vividly the high of the monster's murders in his head. The wild happiness, the rush of absolute power that Voldemort felt when he held somebody's life in his hand.

When his own life and control seemed to be constantly crumbling away, it was blindingly obvious to see why such power and dominion would be alluring. And there was undoubtedly a seductive sort of grace to the way Voldemort killed. He'd seen a lot of crime scenes in his life, and Voldemort had human sacrifice down to an art. Quite literally considering given his worldviews.

Maybe it scared him to go up against a man so persuasive and insidious in his evil - exactly because he *knew* Voldemort's crime scenes. And it had always been about beauty, and disposing of ugliness in the world. At least to the man's own mind.

There was a reason he had no desire to get into an ideological debate with the man.

And...maybe with the bastard's kiss still branded against his lips, it was impossible to forget everything, even if he wanted to.

The last two years had been a practise of repression, of denial and desperately trying to get the other's face out of his head. To stop himself waking up clammy in his bedsheets, twisted up in phantom touch, pale from murder, with that familiar voice in his ear still.

He supposed obsession never was in the control of the obsessed.

In that way, though he didn't want to, he could understand Tom in that. They mirrored each other in twisted fascination. Voldemort was just open in his, whereas Harry couldn't help but be terrified of feeling so deeply about anyone or anything, especially when the subject of said emotion was such a spectre of fear in himself.

He could go up against hardened killers without flinching. His hand was perfectly steady in battle, steel in his spine. But the second somebody put him in front of Tom Riddle, he couldn't help but feel there was no possible way to win.

Even when, by all rights, he already had.

The cost of victory was a funny thing.

He ignored the flushed, pitying faces and walked straight out of the building.

Tom wasn't remotely surprised to find himself in another 'session.'

And a straightjacket too, but that came with the territory.

It was a familiar, and tedious, power play by now.

The man was constantly trying to get in his head, and Tom would have taken the opportunity to provide himself with some more sadistic amusements to pass the time, but Smethwyck's mind didn't interest him enough for him to gain any true satisfaction toying with it.

Not after two years, certainly.

If any entertainment value was to be obtained from the man, he'd burned through in the first week. Now, he was just a dull fixture of his imprisoned life.

Thinking back over his interactions with Harry was a much better use of his time. The look on his face as he kissed him, lips betraying his projected harmlessness. For all their softness, they were unyielding to him, kissing back just as hard. Deceptively pliant only to bite. A bit like Harry all over, really.

It was an interesting matter, this scenario.

By all rights, if there wasn't an implicit challenge offered up, he would have been more than happy to leave Harry and his Horcrux to it. Live, to some extent, vicariously.

He also...well, he couldn't be sure if this version would kill Harry or not. He understood the appeal of doing so, but his own tendencies were tempered by shared experience and the wisdom of years of psychiatric study.

His horcrux was...rawer. It was obvious in the way he was behaving. He was less refined, less dignified in his approach. Far more arrogant too, and he'd always been a self-confident man.

His horcrux was a Dark Lord parodying the role of a serial killer and an artist. His other self was about as disenchanted with his future, as he himself was with his past and the folly of his youth. It was embarrassing to think about, on hindsight.

He couldn't imagine they would get on well, when they inevitably met.

But Harry might. Indeed, Harry might even prefer the Dark Lord. Whilst he'd always been good at masks, his horcrux was not as...developed in them. He could fool the whole world, but Tom very much doubted that he'd be able to fool Harry again so easily. Not now that the boy knew what to look for.

His past-self had never been obvious or anything, it wasn't that simple. But…well, he wasn't at his current level either. Of course he wasn't. He was, if anything, technicalities aside, Harry's peer as barely out of adolescence.

Harry did gravitate to strong passions as much as he recoiled from them, in fear, though. He really hoped they didn't get on.

"Mr Riddle, you must understand that there are...recuperations of your behaviour earlier today," Smethwyck ventured, eventually. He barely bothered to deign that with a response, simply raising his brows mockingly.

What was the idiot going to do, to punish him further that he hadn't already done and tried? The man had taken away his drawing supplies. His pillows. Any books and viable forms of entertainment for varying degrees of time over the period of his capture.

Smethwyck's jaw tightened at his lack of acknowledgement. He knew it infuriated the man to have him straight-jacketed and restrained in front of him in every possible way, and yet to know he was still so incapable of control.

"You understand, of course, that Mr Potter will not be allowed in your cage again," the healer tried again. At that, a small smile curled the corner of Tom's lips.

"I'd like to see you stop him. You've yet to see him fight for something he really wants."

Smethwyck stared at him, eyes dark. They'd 'talked' about Harry every day of the last two years. My, the healer was almost as obsessed with the boy who lived as he himself was.

"Why didn't you push forwards more? You had him pinned against the wall. You could have done anything to him," the man stated.

"Yes," Tom said. "I could have." He didn't elaborate. He didn't expect the Healer to understand the beautiful complexity of possibility, when both parties were so attuned to the power balance, and to the flow of thought between them.

Harry had probably thought of everything he could have done at the same pace that he came up with them. They could guess each other's actions so well, that they could probably go through a whole battle sequence just looking into each other's eyes.

But that was another matter.

“But that wouldn’t be as fun,” Smethwyck stated.

“I am stunned by your insight.”

“You could make this all a lot easier on yourself, if you co-operated,” the healer bit out. As he’d done so many times before.

He gave a wry, vicious sort of smile.

“But that wouldn’t be as fun.”

“There are more *alternative* methods of therapy; if it is fun you are after. I do believe, from your academic papers, that you utilized rather a lot of them behind closed doors.”

He did wonder they would reach this point, and simply tilted his head. The smile on his lips only broadened.

.

Smethwyck stiffened, even when he himself was bound and straight-jacketed, prevented from using magic.

He lunged forward as much as could, as quickly as possible, baring his teeth.

…and laughed as the man scrambled back.

“You wouldn’t stand a chance, Healer Smethwyck. I’d stay with the book.”

He was laughing still when the man snarled and left, hands shaking in his pockets.

“The Boy who Lived. I can’t quite put my finger on you.”

It was several days later that anything even happened. And when it did, it was absolutely not what he expected.

Harry had spent his time immersed in reading, trying to figure out what Tom had meant. The bastard had said that he had given him everything he needed to figure this out and...well, Harry believed him.

It seemed stupid to do so, but it did. After all, Voldemort would never turn him away and say that, when it meant that he would no longer have any reason to return to the criminal asylum.

Harry stiffened at the words sounded from behind; here, of all places.

There were many places considered appropriate for meetings with murderers and criminal nemesis' - abandoned warehouses, creepy back alleys, in the ministry holding cells if things were going particularly well.

But in all the long list of villainous meeting places, Harry had never expected any of them to be in the middle of his bloody grocery shopping.

He hadn't turned around, but he recognized the voice - the impossible voice - and he spun around, heart seizing in his chest.

It…his hand closed around his wand, even as his brow furrowed in confusion. Those eyes were painfully familiar, but everything was different. Disguised, obviously, but not to the point of physical detriment. It did leave some...curiosity as what he looked like normally, but with the voice and the eyes Harry could make a hysterical sort of guess.

He breathed out slowly, clicking out his neck.

And suddenly the public setting made a lot of sense. It was hardly the best place to get into a fight in. The man gave him a sly smile.

"And what do I call you, seeing as you obviously know me," Harry questioned coolly.

This was surreal. He was clutching a damn shopping basket, with a pint of milk and other items. His muscles coiled, considering attacking. Putting an end to all of this. Just as he was about to, slender fingers reached out and curled around his waist.

"Don't," the bastard said, softly, holding his gaze. "I'd hate to turn a friendly chat into a hostage situation, wouldn't you? You didn't really think I came along, did you? I was lead to believe you were brains as well as beauty. Or was I wrong?" The man's gaze darted down to his wand, pointedly waiting for him to let go of it. Harry's teeth gritted.

"My, you need to work on your social skills if this is friendly." His head was spinning. He spoke with Tom's voice. Was that a simulation like his appearance or...Frankenstein's monster? That was the question.

But he had Tom's mannerisms. The little shifts that he'd picked up on, after spending so long in the man's office. But that didn't answer the question of how this was possible.

Dear god, he really hoped Riddle didn't have an evil twin brother or something.

"I dare say it's friendlier than stabbing you in the stomach. Six months of therapy, wasn't it?" The git gave a thin smile. "Must have been terrible for you."

Hostage situation or not, he was a split second away from punching the twat. Punching him and demanding answers, because he didn't think he'd ever been more confused in his life. His mouth felt dry.

"What exactly did you want to have a friendly chat about?"

The other's head tilted, and there was something unnervingly familiar with that gesture too. It was like Riddle. The man behaved like Voldemort did. To a creepy level that was more than just simple mimicry. He was hyperaware of the warm fingers still burning against his side.

But Harry didn't flinch, he refused to. After facing up to Lord Voldemort, no Frankenstein was going to compare. Even if they did act so uncannily like said killer.

"Well, I say it's a chat...it's more of an offer mixed with a warning."

“What makes you think I’d want anything from you?” Harry spat. The copycat gave another smile.

“Because we both want the man who calls himself Lord Voldemort gone,” the man said simply. Harry didn’t allow his eyes to widen. Thrown.

“He’s in prison. He’s not going anywhere,” he snapped. His gut lurched.

“You really think Healer Smethwyck and his band of incompetents is going to hold him forever? And we both know who he’s going to come after when he gets out.” The other’s gaze swept up and down him, and Harry suddenly knew exactly what ‘undressing someone with your eyes’ meant. He bristled a little, starting to feel exposed a way in which he only thought possible standing before Voldemort. “Not that I don’t understand why he would...” the other continued, purring. “You are a remarkable impossibility, Harry Potter. How are you not broken yet?”

“I ask myself the same question most days,” Harry drawled, forcing his voice to remain even. “But I figure that’s more my business than yours.”

“You’d think so, wouldn’t you? I assume he hasn’t told you about me.”

“So you’re offer is what exactly?” Harry ignored the previous question.

“We get rid of him.”

“You mean kill him,” Harry countered.

“Something like that.”

“You seem to have very little issue with murder, what do you need me for?”

“Bait.”

Harry gave an incredulous huff of laughter. He couldn’t believe this was actually happening to him. This was…actually getting insulting. He was getting really sick of victimhood.

He wanted people to stop looking at him with such pity, to stop underestimating him when he'd survived. Despite all the odds, he had bloody well survived so far.

He was not weak. He was not a pushover, no matter what Riddle said.

"And the warning?" Harry raised his brows, a mocking sort of indulgence in his tone. The other wizard's eyes flashed, grip tightening a little.

"I'd like to see you join me, Harry," the copycat murmured, eyes still locked on his own. "I think you have a lot of potential, so I'd hate to have to waste it in your death. As beautiful a crime scene as you would undoubtedly ma-"

"-How is it that you know Tom Riddle? This goes beyond simple vendetta against a serial killer. Was he your murderous mentor or something?" Harry interrupted. The man hadn't been answering his question anyway.

"Something like that," the man repeated. The bastard's gaze flicked over him again, pausing on his scar for a moment, before back to his eyes. The other took a step closer. "It is irrelevant to you."

"Nothing to do with Tom Riddle is irrelevant to me," Harry murmured, chin jutting up a bit.

The man stared back at him for a second, expression impassive. But Harry could practically feel the emotions bubbling beneath the surface.

Wait. No.

Not practically.
He could feel the emotions bubbling beneath the surface. What the hell was this? He thought he could only do this with Voldemort.

And yet…

And yet, the mannerisms between the two were uncanny, he'd already noted that. There was something very odd going on here. Even more so than usual.

"*What* are you?" Harry asked this time, softly. He took a step forward himself, and saw a flicker of surprise in the copycat's eyes. "You're like him. But you're…not cooked properly yet. How about you tell me who and what you are, and why exactly you're so invested in Voldemort, and I'll consider your offer."

The man took a step back, and Harry could feel a grin start to creep onto his own lips. He felt his unease shrink a little, his posture bolstering. His hand shot out, grabbing hold of the copycat's wrist.

"Oh, don't go yet," he continued. "We're just having a *friendly chat."*

Because maybe he was bloody sick of always playing catch up, and, maybe here…in some way he had the upper hand. And he was not letting go of it so easily.

"I suggest you let go of me," the copycat said haughtily. "Or my Death Eaters-"

"Will what?" Harry cut in again, watching the other's lips pinch with irritation at the second interruption. "You said an offer and a warning. Well, maybe I should give you a warning instead, mate. I have spent my whole life dealing with Tom Riddle, and despite everything I was the one who came out on top. He is in a prison cell *because of me.* So maybe you should have thought more carefully before you involved me in this little challenge of yours, because I'm getting really sick of Butterflies and murders within."

The copycat stared at him, and – his eyes started to gleam. Those familiar-yet-different eyes.

"I'm starting to see why he's so enamoured with you. You're full of surprises."

"Yeah, he thought so too when the Aurors charged in and arrested him," Harry said coldly. "Maybe you should be more careful that you don't go the same way."

"You can't beat me, Harry," the copycat laughed. "He lost because he got too cosy with his psychiatric servitude. He limited himself too much. Got caught in some silly little game with you."

"And you obviously have much larger aspirations.
"Should I assume you're turning down my offer, Boy who Lived?" The copycat asked instead.

"You assume correctly."

"Curious that you would pass on a chance to see him suffer, humiliated." Those eyes were like shards of broken glass. "Maybe there's something to those *other* rumours too."

Harry snarled, lunging for the man's throat. The copycat laughed, something wild and not quite human, clutching hold of either side of his face, their lips inches apart as Harry started choking him.

"Consider this your warning, Harry Potter," the other gasped. "You don't want to deny me, or get in my way. You're not the only one with bigger fish to dry."

The second after that the shop exploded around them.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter in honour (and excitement of) the release of the new Hannibal Season 2 trailer. Definitely not a disappointment, and I hope this chapter isn't either because I quite like it. I had a thousand different ideas for their first meeting, which may still come into play in other later meetings instead. But...well, I personally think this one worked. You may disagree. But anyway. Woo!

Part Two: 8

There was pain. Blistering heat and screaming.

Harry lunged forwards, teeth gritted. One hand remained clamped around the copycat's throat, the other rose to quickly try and shield himself from the smoke and the explosion.

The other man had done the same, eyes bleeding scarlet inches away from his face.

Their shields rippled with the force of everything. Harry's mouth soured to think of all the innocent shoppers who got caught in this senseless violence, and his own eyes hardened in turn.

"**Oh no you don't**," he hissed, tightening his grip further. "**You are not disappearing on me.**"

He was so concentrated on winning – in not letting the bastard slip through his fingers and lead them all on a wild goose chase again – that the thought of the copycat side-along apparating them both instead didn't occur to him until a second too late.

Then they were rolling across the floor elsewhere, coughing up dust. Harry dug his wand into the copy cat's throat once more, eyes wild, before they rolled again and the man was straddling his hips for a moment. Hands smashed down against his shoulders to pin him down.

"Feisty little thing, aren't you?" the copycat bared its teeth at him.

"Stubborn is the more common adjective I've heard," Harry spat back. He rolled them over again, and so it continued. The power balance between them swung wildly as spells were knocked aside and blows were parried. Blood spilt, bruises blooming, shields shattered and built in seconds once more.

It was satisfying in a way. The copycat acted so much like Tom, but he didn't...well. Harry could never imagine fighting like this with Voldemort. Even if he knew that he could match the killer, somehow Riddle always managed to make him feel like he couldn't.

Sometimes, he suspected that despite whatever the bastard said, that breaking him down had been far less about building him up again strong and far more about eroding the possibility of a Harry winning.

Psychological battles were hard. He'd never had the best control over his mind and emotions, and certainly not when the battlefield was being distorted and shaped into a weapon and a cage against him before he was even aware of what he was standing on.

But this type of fight? Magic and duelling and old-fashioned fists?
This he knew how to do. This was his area of expertise.

He had the copycat slammed down again, and crushed his knee warningly against the man's groin - ignored the reversal inherent.

"Is that really the best that you've got?" he asked, with a pleasant smile. "I can keep going all night. Stab wound. Makes getting hit in the face pale by comparison."

The copycat glared up at him, disheveled. Harry's smile turned vicious too.

Then the man's expression changed, offering up a smile too. A sly, awful smile.

"Are you trying to impress me, Harry?"

"I-what?"

"I can keep going all night," The copycat quoted back at him. "That could be fun. I mean, it's going to happen eventually anyway."

Harry spluttered. The other took the opportunity to lurch up and spin them again, so Harry's head cracked back against the floor. For a moment, everything was ringing, and he gave a low groan of pain.

"We could do it right now in fact," the copycat continued, eyes gleaming, mouth hot against his ear. "On this floor. Nobody to hear you cry out. Our little secret." Hips ground down against his own, and his breath stuttered.

Harry realized suddenly how - unhinged - the other looked. Voldemort - Tom - always had a poise to him, a grace and sense of composure. It would be easy to say Voldemort was insane, but he wasn't. He was dangerously sane and utterly aware of what he was doing.

This one was different. Harry could see the madness staring back at him. He could see everything. Power splintered, and an unending blood lust. He exhaled slowly. Didn't immediately roll them over again, even when he knew he could.

“I don’t understand you,” he admitted, quietly - watching as those insane eyes flickered a little. “I understand him, I understand Voldemort. I can...feel both of you.” Feel this one’s hatred. Hatred, most of all. Hatred, and pain, and rage, where the Voldemort he’d come to know had always been insidious precisely for his pleasure.

Voldemort wasn’t tormented by the world. The world was his bloody paddling pool. Voldemort hated ugly things, and the copycat… “You have so much hatred,” Harry murmured. “For everyone. Everything. Me. Voldemort. You mimic his kills, but the emotions are all different.”

He realized now that they, too, had been there all along. Fainter than they had been on Voldemort’s crime scenes, and so different to wild happiness and celebration that he was used to confronting that he’d mistook the disgust to simply be his own.

“You...you even hate the victims and judge them weak for falling under your knife. You hate death, because it is more powerful than-”

“Stop it,” it was a hiss, serpentine.

If Harry had ever had any doubt that Voldemort and the Copycat were Frankenstein and Monster, something inexplicably linked and similar, yet exceedingly different, it had vanished now.

The copy was as different from Voldemort as Harry himself was, and yet the same.

If Voldemort was a point of calm and terrible beauty in a changing world, then the copycat was the polar reflection of that.

Voldemort, to his mind, made ugly things beautiful.
The creature in front of him scorned beauty as something unbearable, unattainable, and ripped it to shreds so he didn’t have to look.

He rolled them over again.

“What are you?” he asked, one more time. “What the hell did he do to you?”

It was like flicking a switch.

His counterpart was an infuriating problem. Obviously, Tom was aware that he couldn’t very well

murder his original soul - however much he wanted to smear that blemish of development off the face of the earth - but that didn't mean he wasn't aware of the possibilities nonetheless.

'Something like that', after all.

He loathed Voldemort for what he had become, petty killer over Dark Lord, and yet he was drawn to him too like a centre of gravity. A million different reflections, and he couldn't seem to stop himself from repeating the same tricks and patterns back at him.

That made...Harry Potter interesting. An anomaly in a fixed solar system.

He stared at the boy, and he could see his future self staring back. It made him want to crush the ex-Auror. But it also fascinated him, to see how profound an influence he had.

Harry was like him.
He realized it, sharply - outside of plain manipulations.

And he wanted.

Wanted to cherish and grind their bones together, to own and possess completely.
Wanted to crush and tear and shatter, just like he did anything that had the potential to challenge him.

But, right now, Harry Potter was a weapon he couldn't afford to discard so easily.
Not after everything. He thought quickly, adjusted plans and struggles and layered up the steps.

"Do you know what a Horcrux is?"

There are a lot of events and secrets in life for a person to feel guilty over, but Hermione couldn't help but think that her crimes were inadvertently the worst.

She had slowly slipped out of close contact with Harry, barely able to bear the drag of memories between them - the empty space of a trio, unbalanced.

They'd never been so good with just the two of them. Oh, she still loved Harry dearly, of course, but...it was difficult when they saw each other. Saw each other and saw Ron bloodied in the silence and the settling of dust between them.

And maybe, worse than Ron, worst of all her sins was that she'd been the one to push Harry to Voldemort in the first place. They both knew it. Harry would never have met or trusted Tom Riddle without her recommendation, and so, however unknowingly, she'd pushed her best friend straight into his trap.

That wasn't a truth easily forgiven.

Maybe if she hadn't, Ron would still be alive.

Maybe if she hadn't, countless others would be too.

Maybe if she hadn't, Harry wouldn't have ended up popping pills and alcohol just to get himself out of bed every morning.

And maybe, because she had, Voldemort had been caught for their closeness.

God knew, she'd spent the last two years analysing the situation from every possible angle. Trying to see where she'd gone wrong. What she'd missed. How they could all have missed such a thing as Tom Riddle? How she, if she was so clever, could have been so stupid as to offer her best friend up to the monster, blindly?

Either way, Hermione's heels clicked down the walkway to Voldemort's holding cell now. Her mouth felt unbearably parched, but she forced herself onward until she came to a stop in front of him. The

lewd calls of her the other prisoners chased her heels, sunk ugly into her skin as her fingers clenched to a fist.

“That’s enough. Don’t be rude.” The cells immediately went deathly silent around the voice. That voice and obedience which did nothing to reassure her of his imprisoned harmlessness. “Miss Granger…” Voldemort murmured, head tilting to one side. “What a pleasant surprise.”

His eyes seemed to crawl over her. It took its time, studying every inch and plucking out what it wanted, without asking for permission.

Had his gaze always been this hungry?

“I-” she steeled herself, straightened.

“But pleasant surprise or not,” he’d already interrupted, turning away, “you are not Harry Potter. I am sure he has filled you in on our arrangement. I have no interest in negotiating with anybody else.”

“Harry’s missing.”

His head snapped back at that.

“What happened?” Riddle demanded.

“Why should I tell you? I am not apparently open to negotiation with serial killers,” she replied. His eyes narrowed, and he lunged closer to the glass in a split second. She flinched despite the cage, and could have kicked herself for it.

His hands flattened against the glass, before twisting to fists.

“Why are you here, Miss Granger?” The polite tone was back. Those eyes remained deadly. It was jarring, in comparison to the times she’d seen him with his mask still on. The darkness hidden away in the lines of his expensive suit. Even the tone and the expression on his face jarred each other, leaving a lurch of uneasiness in her gut.

Well, that was certainly one question, wasn’t it?

“I want you to tell me who’s behind this.”

“I have no reason to,” he said - tone a mockery of her intelligence. Maybe in some way it was true, and by all accounts expecting him to tell her was plain stupidity. But she had to do something.

Harry had been slowly getting his life on track. She couldn’t just watch as Tom Riddle meticulously unravelled him again. It wasn’t fair. Harry deserved far better than to go through the whole nightmare again. It was supposed to be over.

The worst was, she had no idea what had happened.

It had been two weeks since the Grocery Store exploded, and witnesses said they’d seen Harry Potter inside. He wasn’t among the bodies of the dead, and though she dreaded the thought of losing him, Hermione almost thought it would have been better if she was. At least then she’d know. At least then, there wasn’t the possibility of him suffering further.

“Not even to help Harry? You don’t want him dead. I know you don’t,” she persisted.

“The greatest help I can give Harry is forcing him to fall back on his own resources, and rely on himself,” Voldemort drawled.

“Funny you should say that considering how much you coaxed him to rely on you.” Hermione’s tone was brittle.

“He needed something to hold onto then,” Riddle dismissed. “He was an open wound. Vulnerable.”

“What is he now then?”

“Do you think he is still an open wound?” He flipped the question back on her, a thin smile on his lips. “You seem to doubt his survival abilities, Miss Granger. Perhaps you resent him for failing to save Mr Weasley?”

“This isn’t about me,” she snapped. “And just for reference, no. I don’t.”

Riddle hummed, head tilting to one side.

“A perfectly natural response, of course,” he murmured. “Anger is a customary response to the loss of a loved one, and certainly people are inclined towards blame.”

“I don’t blame Harry!”

“Does he blame you? After all, you are the one who gave him to me.” His eyes gleamed, and Hermione’s blood froze. “Thank you for that. It really was a rather lovely gift.”

Her fists clenched at her sides, trembling.

“You don’t intend to help him.”

“I don’t intend to help you.” He once again turned away, dismissively. “And you must have known that, even when coming here. You are not a stupid girl. Which leads me to wonder what your true intentions and plan are. Or have things in the world crumbled so that I would be people’s first choice for assistance still?”

“Harry doesn’t disappear off the face of the earth like this, without warning. He wouldn’t.” Despite her best efforts, her voice quivered. Just a fraction. “You are…” she stopped that line of enquiry, skipped ahead. “If anyone can track him down, its you,” she finished.

He went still, hands resting over his desk.

“When did he go missing?”

“Two weeks ago. There was an explosion.”

“And your immediate assumption is that he is still alive?” His voice was perfectly even, uncaring.

“You don’t think he is?”
No. Harry was still alive. He had to be.

Voldemort said nothing, before abruptly spinning to face her once more.
His smile was the most unnerving thing she’d ever seen.

Part Two: 9

There were numerous forms of psychological correction that he could turn to. Most of them, at one point in time, Smethwyck would never have even considered attempting. Some were hardly ethical.

But Tom Riddle, Lord Voldemort, seemed a monster beyond cure.

Two years, and he'd shown no signs of improvement. No signs of connection, even when by all standards he would latch onto his healer – of course he should, when he had few other points of contact with the world.

Anyone would.

Anyone was not, apparently, Riddle.

He'd had the man under his evaluation since day one of his incarceration, and even now there was only one thing he could be absolutely certain of.

Tom Riddle was obsessed with Harry Potter.

He couldn't help but wonder if either of them, Riddle or Potter, were fully aware of towhat extent this fascination ran, or the length or depth of consequence that would come out of it.

He'd confiscated enough of Voldemort's art to know of its predominant contents – sometimes scenery; Hogwarts castle, his old office or various landmarks or people.

Sometimes he sketched out his crime scenes again in vivid detail, presumably as a form of reliving them.

But mostly it was Harry.

Sometimes the Boy Who Lived was smiling, other times frowning or lost in thought. Various ages across the sketches. Free and sprawled lazily, asleep, tied up – stabbed. Sometimes it seemed there was every possible combination. Every fantasy, however twisted or lewd.

Maybe that was Riddle reliving his crimes again too. His ultimate crime, and the crime scene he had made of the younger man's body.

He didn't think Potter knew of the exact nature of the sketches, and he wasn't so cruel a man to show them all to him, even though he'd referenced them to the boy before.

When he first took Riddle on as a patient, he assumed the obsession stemmed out of loose strings. Potter was simply 'the one who got away' – twice now in fact.

" Harry hasn't gotten away. He never will, and he knows that."

Nowadays he was not quite so certain.

He made sure Riddle was well and truly secured before approaching.

Harry Potter rested withdeceptive peace next to him.

Potter was half-tangled up in fine, Egyptian cotton sheets, perfectly still except for the rise and fall of his chest. Tom lay curled next to him, mapping tanned skin with his fingers.

He considered the pulse that thudded beneath his lips as he moved them over the man's throat, the woodsy smell of him that seemed so clean and pure in comparison to the shadow in Potter's eyes.

He stroked over the puckered scar snaking across the lower half of Potter's belly, feeling the edges of it shattering the smoothness of soft flesh.

"Admiring your counterpart's handiwork?" Potter murmured.

Tom considered Potter's chapped lips, still reddened and slightly swollen from the force of their kisses. Potter's eyes were still closed, insultingly unbothered by his lingering close proximity and examination.

His hands paused.

"For someone who claims to make the ugly beautiful, I believe he made a mistake with you," he replied. "You're exquisite enough without a brand."

He hated it. It made him want to dig his nails in and claw, shatter possible perfection into something more worthy of the wretched filth of the world.

Potter snorted, and this time green eyes opened and fixed on him – considering him in turn.

He immediately dipped forward to claim the man's lips again, only for fingers to wind painfully tight into his hair.

"And yet, both of you would *die* to brand me as your own," came themocking response against his mouth. He bit down hard, but that only prompted further laughter.

"You already live to be branded by us," he said coldly. "Horcrux. Frankly, you're more me than I am."

That made Potter shut up, and he grinned victoriously in response.

"Clearly I understand you better at least," Potter muttered, after a moment. "I know better than to think your plan of entrapment will work."

It was obvious that he couldn't kill his serial killer counterpart, however much he desperately wanted to sometimes. He could imagine Voldemort felt the same way about Potter – want and violence twining to paradoxes of action. Desires for murder balanced by the foolishness of it.

It was, of course, perfectly possible to kill part of your own soul; but in the grand scheme of things, it was a final solution not to be taken lightly.

So he intended to trap his counterpart instead, lock him away in an eternity of tedious, unfeeling darkness – just like he had been tucked away suffering since his conception.

His prison still hung heavy and golden around his neck, as Potter studied it.

"And yet, here you are," he stated.

Harry gave him an entirely-too-innocent smile.

"You're not the only one who wants to see him suffer."

If he believed in and was capable of such things, he may have been in love.

"What if I could give you the name of the man behind this?" Riddle murmured. Smethwyck paused, studying the killer strapped down and once more straight-jacketed for their session.

"I would imagine you had some type of scheme in mind, especially in the light of Miss Granger's visit," he replied. Whatever the man's low opinion of him, he wasn't so obtuse as to trust his most dangerous inmate. "Generosity is not in your nature."

"Generosity is indicative of power, as is the right and opportunity of granting mercy. Power is always in my nature, Healer."

"And yet you are powerless to save Harry Potter from whatever fate has befallen him." He watched closely for his reaction, for any reaction, any sign.

He'd come to the conclusion that Potter was the path to getting at Voldemort, to understanding him or defeating him. It was such a pity that the boy had been so resistant to the greater psychiatric good.

There was a flicker of something in Voldemort's cold, almost reptilian gaze.

"And you are powerless to read me without using him as your measurement, so one would assume it is in your best interest to see him saved," the killer returned.

His eyes narrowed. The pleasant smile on Voldemort's face only broadened, charming by all accounts in a way that jarred with the true horror of his capabilities.

"Who is behind this?"

"It is not in my nature to be so generous as to offer information freely." The statement was withering in the light of his own comments, and his jaw clenched.

"And your demand is…?"

"I give you all you need to catch him and write your book. You give me a room with a view, and negotiate a way for me to receive all the information the Aurors possess on the disappearance of Harry Potter."

It was only a matter of time, Tom was sure of it.

Whilst his counterpart seemed more patient than he and the years could attest to that, in circumstances such as these the current state of the situation would not last much longer.

But, perhaps, a final push...

Both of them had been caged, and neither of them wanted to live like that again.

Harry Potter was the prize of whoever emerged victorious in freedom. Bait, trophy, and maybe something else that required more careful monitoring.

He didn't trust Potter certainly, however innocent a picture he presented curled up with his eyes closed. However much of an agreement they had found in the stasis of the last two weeks.

Potter was curious, perhaps, and had gained a strange resolve once he discovered the true connection between their souls.

Tom just wasn't yet certain what the resolve was for, or what it meant.

All he knew was that he had no intention of losing.

His shoes clipped down the floor of the psychiatric hospital, his disguise meticulously in place – a barrier of journalistic files and notepads clutched carefully in his hands.

There had been an influx of journalists into the hospital again, though his counterpart had been resistant to their attentions before. But it would do for this.

He had enough of his growing network to amount some influence on his surroundings, when necessary. Even after the fiasco at the grocery store.

"I'd say I'm a fan of your work," he said, coming to a halt before the glass. "But we both know that would be a gross misrepresentation of a truth already twisted."

His counterpart's head snapped up immediately. Tom smiled, slowly. Voldemort's gaze moved over him, and over the surroundings.

"I was wondering when you would pay me a visit," his counterpart replied, rising and stepping close to the glass. "I'm sure this is very satisfying for you."

"I can't decide if it's satisfying or embarrassing," he said, stepping close too, drinking in familiar-yet-unfamiliar features. "It's the pitiful possibility of a future, certainly."

"Where's Harry?"

"Maybe he's dead, maybe he's dying, maybe he's tied to my bed or maybe he's having a lovely holiday in the Caribbean. I'll leave it to your imagination. Where do you think he is?"

His smile broadened. His counterpart's gaze slid even colder than before.

"If this was two years ago, I would tell you that if you so much as touched him that I would make living without body and senses seem like a sweet blessing in comparison to the tortures that await you at my hand." The tone was soft, quiet.

"And now? You'll cower in a glass rat cage?" Tom laughed.

"Now I know enough to know that I don't need to make such threats or come for you, when you made the mistake of targeting the one man equal to us." The smile his counterpart gave made his own vanish, and pale fingers spread pressed flat on the glass between them. "You think you control him, and that he is a trophy you acquire as a matter of fact. Some inert, pretty little pet that is the rightful total of your desires…I did too."

"Potter does not have the strength to go against me. He is all bluffs and punches and brawn. His mind is broken." His fists began to clench at his sides, rage swelling in his chest as his counterpart continued to watch him clinically – with none of the desperate fury that he had expected.

"You intend to use him as bait without realizing that he may already have hooked you."

"I'm not you. I have not fallen into a sentimental old age where I let feelings get in my way. If I have to-"

"-I won't deny you. I'll hunt you down, indulge your challenge and game and see you made into something better than you are now," Voldemort persisted. "I promised Harry I would come for him, it's a matter of principle and if you're in my way when I do then on your own childish head be it-"

"-Oh, he's waiting for you to save him, that explains a-"

Voldemort cut over him again, dismissively.

"So did you merely come here to gloat, or did you have something more important to say?"

"I grow tired of waiting for you. Your kills bore me. I have bigger plans. Break out and finish this, if you can. Or you'll never see him again."

"How does Friday, seven O clock sound? We can have dinner."

This time, their smiles were identical.

It was Wednesday when the hospital alarm bells began to shriek.

A/N: Terrible cliffhanger, I know, considering how long I kept you waiting but oh my god did you see the Hannibal finale? :O And don't worry, everything will become clear in the end...

Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tom smoothed down his robes - unfortunately not tailored, as all of his belongings had been auctioned, collected for evidence or exhibition - and stepped up to the door. He knocked once, sharply.

A strange anticipation coiled in his belly.

It didn't take long for the door to open, and for his younger counterpart to smile at him. "I'm so glad you could make it," the Horcrux said.

He hated looking at it, at its reminder of childish dreams and ambitions. Of Dark Lords and blood purity, and his world before Harry Potter.

He stepped in, the door swinging shut behind him.

The sizzling smell of roast lamb and herbs wafted from the kitchen. Harry's doing, no doubt. Although in their past the young man had more often ended up at his house and at his kitchen table, it was not for lack of skill so much as Harry's insistent refusal to look after himself properly.

Tom's head tilted, considering.

It seemed surreal - the food at the prison for the criminally insane could be called little more than gruel. He inhaled subtly, though perhaps not quite subtly enough considering the gleam in his younger counterpart's eyes.

His fingers flexed at his sides. The Horcrux's murders were finger painting in comparison to his own cultivated masterpieces. "I take it he's in the kitchen?"

"He makes an excellent pet," the Horcrux smirked. "I truly don't know how he managed to beat you, you must have lost your touch."

"I underestimated him." He wasn't sure if he meant it as a warning or not, dismissing his counterpart

and focusing on Harry. If it came down to choosing between two bits of his soul, he knew which fragment he'd choose. Tom moved closer to the kitchen, heart pounding electric in his chest.

He'd been able to touch Harry, once, at the prison. But that hadn't been the same, had it? Harry had only done it because he saw no other option, and everyone else at the scene were negligent enough to let the boy do it. That was why Harry needed him. Someone to buffer him from the world, to draw out his strength and sharpen the blunted edges of his defiance.

He saw Harry's back first, could see the lines of tension in Harry's shoulders even through the material of a fine green shirt that no doubt brought out his eyes perfectly.

Tom could feel his horcruxes watching him.

And even as he watched Harry, he saw the tension dissolve. Harry had evidently heard them coming, heard the door, but he didn't turn.

Tom wetted his lips and moved closer, the Horcrux be damned. He wouldn't let a past mistake ruin this present. He'd dreamed about a reunion between them, unfettered by glass prisons or Smethwyck's rule. He smoothed his hands over Harry's shoulders, kneading the tight skin and pressing his lips to Harry's ear. "I told you I'd come for you." Low, so his counterpart wouldn't hear.

A shudder ran down Harry's spine, and his fist white-knuckled around the kitchen knife.
But he didn't say anything. No greeting, no witty comment or even insult.

Tom frowned. He slid his hands up, taking Harry's chin between his fingers so he could nudge the young man to look at him properly.

Harry could be a wonderful actor, but Tom had spent years unravelling him, picking him apart and putting him back in new and more beautiful arrangements. Harry's eyes never lied even if the rest of him pulled it off flawlessly. He was lying now - a submission that didn't come easily to him, though most would be fooled.

Curious. He raised a questioning eyebrow, smirk tugging at one corner of his lip to show Harry just how much he hadn't fooled him.

And Harry rolled his eyes, a brief flicker of glorious emotion. "You know I'm holding a knife and could still stab you, right?" I don't need your help.

Tom pressed a kiss to his cheek and pulled back, thoroughly intrigued by this development.
The Horcrux watched them both with narrowed eyes.

“I take it back,” he said, in the most sincere voice he could manage “You have him remarkably well trained, I don’t know you did it. I’ve never seen him so docile when he hasn’t just murdered someone.”

It wasn’t that his younger self was stupid, no part of him had ever been stupid. It was simply being so convinced of his own superiority that his ideologies didn’t account for anyone matching him - like Harry. It would seem natural to his Horcrux that Harry should easily submit, that he himself would inevitably win because they always did win.

Harry shot him a look at that.

The Horcrux moved forward, sliding an arm around Harry’s waist like he was a prize to be won, pressing a kiss to his other cheek. “Maybe you simply didn’t have the right touch to him.”

It was the strangest thing to watch.

Tom felt a hot lick of possessiveness, among other things, coil up his spine. But how could he help himself? Harry was never so ravishing then at his most dangerous. The man was scheming.

Maybe he truly didn’t need a rescue, but Tom would always come anyway, even if only for the show. For the freedom rushing giddy through his veins - no matter what, he’d never give it up again.

They made small talk and discussed the dinner menu, as if they weren’t all there for a fight. As if one wrong twitch wouldn’t shatter the peace.

Tom studied the familiar locket around his Horcrux’s neck. “So,” he kept his voice casual, and kept Harry in his periphery. “How exactly did you manage all of this? I’m sure you’re dying to boast.”

He looked to see if Harry’s lips would twitch a smile in that comment, but Harry didn’t look at him. Harry was watching his Horcrux, and it shouldn’t have irritated him as much as it did. But he remembered Harry visiting him in his prison cell, he remembered Harry spread out on a bed beneath him - Harry focused on him as if he was the centre of the world, seeing him.

The Horcrux drew Harry closer as if he could sense his thoughts, carding his fingers through Harry's hair with another arm wrapped around the boy's waist. "People are easy to manipulate," he murmured. "Bellatrix Lestrange was so desperate for someone to talk to, after her psychiatrist was incarcerated. She was quite happy to spill her soul to me. Such a pity I didn't have Harry then."

It galled him to see his Horcrux talk about Harry as if he wasn't standing right there. It galled even worse to see Harry stay silent and docile, even when he knew damn well that it was a trick. He'd seen Harry broken and buckling and this wasn't it.

His own arms felt achingly empty and he took a sip of his wine, wishing he could have some time with Harry alone. To speak to him properly, to hold and examine.

Harry had bite marks on his neck, delicate purple against his tanned skin.

Tom's stomach clenched tight at the sight and Harry's eyes flicked over him finally, the only sign that he was truly aware of Tom's presence in the room still at all. Their gaze locked, and the possessiveness throbbed hot between them like the lightning touch of a kiss.

Harry casually tilted his neck, exposing his throat all the more as he tucked himself like something sweet beneath his counterpart's chin. A silent taunt.

Tom looked back to his Horcrux's smug face and felt it rather too long since he'd watched someone bleed out across the floor.

Dinner was served presently and with a maddening pleasantness.

The lamb was delicious.

Harry forced himself to eat, to seem as casual as possible as if he wasn't hyperaware of sitting with two Voldemorts at a dinner table.

The last two weeks had been a minefield of manipulation. Of learning about Horcruxes, of clawing up every scrap of knowledge about Voldemort's - Tom's - past that he could. Mostly he had fragments,

of grim and greying orphanages, of bombs and plans for world domination.

He wondered how different things would have been if Tom had become a Dark Lord instead of a serial killing psychiatrist, but he held no love for the world Tom's younger counterpart painted. It lacked the beauty of Tom's murders, as awful as that sounded. Compelling, perhaps, in the absolute pride and celebration of magic but disgusting and hypocritical beyond that. The Voldemort he knew was many things, but not a hypocrite.

Beyond learning, he'd worked to establish himself as not a threat. He'd played the fantasy role that Voldemort once carved out for him in butterflies and blood. He was strong, superficially. Witty comments and bravado that was easily manipulated. He was fascinated by the Horcrux's thoughts, tempted by his worldviews - and if there was a bit too much truth to his interest when the counterpart most reflected the original, well, he wasn't admitting it so easily.

Cutlery clinked, the silken shirt slid cool against his skin like he imagined Tom's touch might. Even not looking at him, Harry was aware of him. Of every breath, every shift of movement, of the stare that burrowed him with such frequency and burned into his skin. His heart raced.

The counterpart Voldemort had set everything up for a ritual to trap Tom, to trade the places between original and Horcrux so Tom was the one tied to the locket instead. Trapped, dead to the world.

Harry expected to feel happy. He didn't really, two weeks with a twenty year old Tom only made him think of his former psychiatrist more. Of dancing at the Ministry ball and warm breath on his cheek, of the nights when he'd stumbled mostly broken into Tom's house and felt soothed beyond measure.

There was a horrible irony to the fact that the last time he felt safe was in Tom's care.

There was a horrible irony that when he climbed into bed with the Horcrux and called it manipulation, a false marker of surrender that he knew Tom's creation would snatch up as eagerly as Tom himself once would. That Voldemort once would, but they were the same. Tom-Voldemort, inseparably entwined. Harry-Voldemort.

He excused himself to the loo.

Tom caught up with him almost the second he stepped out of the Horcrux's earshot.

“Harry,” he called. Even listening to that voice for two weeks didn’t soften the effect.

Harry steeled a breath and clenched his jaw - was he prepared to face Tom, now, finally? He’d bloody well have to be. “You’re not being very subtle,” he kept his voice low.

“I don’t need to be subtle, we all know I’m here for you,” Tom said. “You’re acting very docile.”

“Jealous?”

Tom’s hand shot out, catching hold of his wrist. The connection seared up Harry’s arm like a bolt of heat, spreading through every inch of his body.

It froze Harry to the spot, even if the grip itself was fairly loose. A touch, more than anything more restraining, handling him like he was delicate.

He turned to face Tom properly, heart jumping into his throat. “Maybe you had already broken me in,” he said next, and gave a mirthless smile. “What, is the picture perfect Harry Potter not so perfect close up? Isn’t this what you wanted?”

“I never wanted you to have to pretend with me,” Tom said, so soft so sincere that it ached in Harry’s chest. He wished Tom didn’t mean it, as much as he wished Voldemort had never dreamed of butterflies to save him.

“You didn’t want me either,” Harry replied.

“I told you,” Tom’s voice lowered too as he leaned in. “It’s not about that anymore. I find the real Harry Potter much better.” Tom’s other hand slid up, cupping his cheek with a disarming tenderness. “I’m here, aren’t I, despite your little trap?”

Harry’s stomach dropped out. “Trap?”

Tom’s head tilted, and a small smile flickered across his lips. “Yes, trap. Or did you think I wouldn’t know?”

Harry’s mouth felt utterly dry and he twitched a little in Tom’s grip, despite himself. Feeling thoroughly exposed - of course, the Horcrux could have that effect too, he was a young Voldemort after all, but he was still as blinded by his own want and entitlement as the man-monster in front of him used to be, and not half as wise. More passionate, instead, or at least more visible in the bloody teeth and heart of him whereas the elder Tom could play his personas with such flawless control that even Harry, living in Voldemort’s head as much as his own, sometimes struggled to tell the difference between what was mask and what was skin.

“How?” The docility vanished, crumbled away. Unsustainable in front of this version. Instead, he burned. Burned with his own hunger, his hate, his curiosity. His voice came out raspy.

Tom's smile broadened a fraction. "You once told me that you didn't want to move on, because you saw moving on as a confirmation that what has been done to you, and the things that you have done, were okay." The smile disappeared without a trace. "If you're so convincingly playing the lamb again now, it rather suggests you're up to something. Of course this is a trap. He could not hold you unwillingly even if he wanted to."

He knew how much time he'd spent in Voldemort's head, knew Tom's murders as his own and how they'd crawled so far into each other's brains that neither of them knew how to untangle the chains...it was always a strange reminder that Tom was tangled too. This wasn't the clinical observations of a psychotic psychiatrist, objective and removed and seeing problems to fix instead of people. Not anymore. Not for a while now.

"But who is the trap for, Harry," Tom continued, palm still warm against his cheek. Caressing idly, luxuriating in a simple touch. "Is it for me or is for him?"

"If you think there's a trap," Harry wetted his dry lips. "Why are you here?"

"I promised you that I would come for you." Tom said it like it was simple. "I'll always come for you. I'll always keep my promises to you, no matter what else I may do."

Harry's breath caught in his throat, eyes widening. The world narrowed down to the two of them, to the sharp disinfectant smell of Tom fresh out of prison, to the murderous hands cradling him like he was something precious beyond measure, to warm breath puffing over his own. "That's more ominous than reassuring," he managed. "Is it me you're coming for or your soul?"

All the visions, all the emotions, because he carried a shard of a once Dark Lord's immortality.
"Is there a difference?" Tom raised his brows.

It was strange to talk so openly about such things now. But they'd probably talked too long already and this was hardly the time or place for such discussions, in the middle of a chess board.

"You know he's probably listening to every word we say," Harry said, keeping his voice quiet still. Barely audible, just between them.

"Of course," Tom said. "It's the only reason he let us both leave the room at the same time, seemingly alone. I don't care. As I said, we all know what I'm here for and I know what he's here for too. I was him, once, after all."

Harry wasn't so sure about that - there was something unhinged about the Horcrux that he could never imagine in the Voldemort he knew. He'd noted that before.

"You shouldn't be here," he said, with the same quietness as before, regardless of Tom speaking normally.

Tom's eyes gleamed at that. "Are you glad I am?"

Harry pulled away, cheeks still hot with the phantom memory of Voldemort's fingers. Steady, not-safe and yet the good memories came with it just as much as the bad. But with all he'd sacrificed to see

Voldemort caught, how could he possibly let Tom go now? He couldn't, anymore than Tom's other Horcrux could.

Voldemort was both of their prison.

You're underestimating him just like you underestimated me, don't you ever learn?
He's going to ruin you, and he has no interest in making you beautiful.
You're free, why would you ever come running back to the one who caught you?
You both have this problem. A fatal flaw, really. I call it you're in love with me.

The responses crossed Harry's mind but he swallowed them down and turned away.
"I need to piss, I assume that's allowed."

He felt Tom's gaze follow him all the way around the floor and never thought he'd wish Tom would run, even for a second.

Either way, it would all end tonight.

Chapter End Notes

As you might have imagined by the updating gap, I had horrendous writer's block for this story. But damn it I will finish it. So, yeah, sorry if this chapter was a bit crap, it was smash at the writer's block with all the grace and eloquence of a hammer or never finish it. Hope you managed to find some enjoyment in it.

Chapter 38

Tom set his fork down with a neat click onto his plate, shoving it away and watching Harry and his horcrux tense out of the corner of his eye. He wet his lips, practically able to feel the tension crackling through the air. Savouring it.

He was amazed that they'd managed to contain themselves as he helped himself agonizingly slowly through a second helping, as if he wasn't perfectly aware of the way they watched his every move like vultures.

"So," he asked lazily. "How exactly are you planning to take my freedom away from me?"

He would never allow it to happen – being caught once made him certain of how ill-suited he was to a life imprisoned. But, of course, it would be what Harry and his horcrux were striving for. It was the perfect bitter revenge for the chains he had encircled around them both, as if they didn't ache for him.

His counterpart's spine straightened and he glanced at Harry.

Tom kept his eyes on Harry too. Harry was the one who'd beaten him before, who survived him despite all the odds and proved himself worthy of the soul he carried. He knew what the horcrux would do, but Harry had always been rather more intriguing to try and predict.

Harry calmly set down his knife and fork, mimicking him and pushing it away. "We're going to put you in the locket," he said. He met Tom's eyes boldly now, unflinching. Maybe because he couldn't afford to flinch. Maybe because he no longer felt he had to.

"And why ever would I allow you to do that?" he asked. He was curious what the two had spent the last weeks scheming in his absence, what desperation and fear and obsession would drive Harry to. His beautiful deadly butterfly.

"It's not really about allow," the horcrux said smugly. "The potion to trap your soul is already in the food – all I have to do is complete the ritual."

Tom raised his brow at that, considering his options as he glanced at Harry again. "Prison wasn't punishment enough? My, how powerless you feel against me," he purred. "Even winning wasn't enough for you. Do you still wake up screaming my name?"

Harry's jaw clenched and he jutted his chin up. "You broke out of prison."

"For you."

"Is this you begging for mercy?"

"No," Tom said. "But I was in prison. You could have simply captured my dearest locket self and dragged him as the copycat to a Ministry holding cell two weeks ago – you didn't. Did you want to see if I really would come for you? If I could?" He leaned in a little across the table.

"Do you really doubt that we could do it?" his horcrux demanded coolly. "You're outnumbered."

Tom was more concerned with watching Harry swallow. Drinking up the emotions saturating the table between them like it was the sweetest, most exquisite dessert. His eyes lit up. Harry *had* wanted to know, needed to know, to try and desperately puzzle out how much the support Tom had built for him

was a lie. He wanted to draw him close, to remind him that he alone would always be there for Harry when everyone else was gone.

"Perhaps," he murmured instead in reply to the horcrux. "Perhaps not. I believe that's still being decided. You didn't do the cooking after all, did you?"

His horcrux stiffened, turning in his seat to look at Harry. "Potter knows the plan."

"What Harry knows and what Harry does are often vastly different things," Tom said. "He's good at stalling. Good at playing us, too."

"Good at playing you, perhaps," the horcrux said.

"You're still staying silent?" Tom tipped his head to look at Harry again. "Nothing to say on this matter? No accusations? That might work with him, but I know you far better than that – I made you, after all."

That got a reaction, Harry's eyes blazing back at him like they had that night in the Riddle house when he was at his most vulnerable and most deadly all at once. "Maybe I'm done saying anything to either of you," he said. "You're not my psychiatrist anymore, and didn't you *both* eat the food?"

"Why haven't you done away with us both, then, if that's what you want?" Tom asked. He spread his arms, only settling further back in his seat to make himself comfortable. "This is your show, Harry. I'm merely here for the front row seats."

"Considering you hated prison, do you really expect me to believe you haven't planned against being put in the locket? That you don't intend to fight?" Harry snapped.

The horcrux looked between them more guardedly now, seeming to have realised that he'd missed something potentially lethal.

Despite all of Tom's best efforts at shattering Harry, at building him anew, he always found his way back to himself. Harry Potter was stubbornly – defiantly – himself. Even if he didn't realize it. Unswayed by torment or someone else's soul inside his head. It was the same realization Tom himself had when he stabbed Harry at the Riddle house.

"I want to see if you actually try it." It felt like having Harry in his office after hours again, delighting in watching him puzzle out his own desires and brain like it was foreign territory to him. Considering how much Harry flinched from his own heart's desires and thoughts, maybe it was. "It's a plan rather more to what most people would consider my tastes than yours, isn't it? That bothers you."

Tom knew he was right at the almost imperceptible tightening of Harry's posture. "It's how you define yourself, after all," he continued casually. "That blurring line you have struggled against for so long. What is you, what is Voldemort. Is the possibility of victory you are feeling right now mine, yours, or maybe even his?"

"I can't afford to let either of you go," Harry said. His eyes burned into Tom. "You're bloody immortal, barely human. You have hurt more people than even I can name."

"Yes," Tom agreed. "But I am not the one trapping you. You were as imprisoned as I was physically, but it wasn't truly because of me. You know that. Putting me in that locket would not set you free. Isn't that what you want – freedom? Peace?"

Harry stood up in a surge of frustration, impatient now to get on with the horror of it all. "Might make me feel better though."

The horcrux shot to his feet, panic crossing his face far too visibly.

Harry didn't even look over at him, knocking him back down into his chair and binding him there with a delightfully dismissive flick of his hand.

But then, this had never really been about the horcrux, had it? No matter how much his younger self liked to believe himself the centre of the world. Oh, Tom wouldn't let harm come to him, of course, but he had no time for Dark Lords and revolution anymore.

Tom stood up too, grinning. "Oh that would *torture* you, if you felt good about our suffering, especially considering the cost of completing this ritual," he said. "It takes atrocities to create a horcrux. To tear someone's soul from their body and trap it in a trinket. You do that, and you are everything I used to wish for you, butterfly mine."

Harry faltered for a second, before snapping back, "I'm sure I'd survive it." He went to the cupboard, drawing out the ritual elements, plucking the locket from around the horcrux's neck and setting it down on the table. "I've survived worse."

"Not worse than him," the horcrux said. "Put him in, then we'll talk."

Tom only needed to raise an eyebrow and Harry glared at him, furiously, across the dinner table. It was all so familiar. He'd missed this. Harry was so *raw.*

"I know who I am," Harry practically snarled. "I do not need you to define my sense of self."

"You're getting there."

He was certain Harry wouldn't actually be able to complete the ritual, he was too terrified of his own capacity for viciousness. Still, Harry was right, he planned for the unlikely possibility all the same.

"You have to follow the plan," the horcrux said, more desperately now. "He's trying to get under your skin – I told you he'd do this. Don't listen to him. Can't you see how easily he's playing you?"

"I'm not playing. It's your choice," Tom said. "Is the trap for me or is it for him? Have you decided? Or are we taking a moral high ground where you try and drag us to the ministry?"

"I could do it."

"Of course you could. Do you think it means you will no longer feel me in your head? What if that's not true? What if instead of the happiness I grant you there is cold, and black, and nothingness like the grave. Can you bear to suffer that eternity with me?"

Harry wet his lips. He looked down at the locket in his hands, so deliciously uncertain despite his best efforts. Then he met Tom's eyes and fiendfyre burst in his palms and the horcrux screamed and screamed and screamed.

"**Your soul,**" Harry hissed, "**is *poison*.**"

Tom's face twisted and he lunged for his wand.

It was too late. The horcrux was gone, nothing but ash and ringing silence as they pointed their wands at each other.

The emotions soared between them, disorientating and glorious and terrible beyond all measure. Harry could only grab snatches of them – hatred, fury, adoration, *hurt*. Like Tom's soul was finger-painting all of Harry's nerve endings. Or maybe it was the other way round.

"Poison?" Tom repeated.

Harry's heart lurched in his chest and his fingers tightened on his wand. He had to finish this.

"*Poison?*" Tom stepped closer, and Harry backed up to keep distance between them. "You imagine, perhaps, that I am the serpent in the garden to sink teeth into your virtue and ruin you for paradise forever?" He laughed wildly. "Even now?"

The distress felt genuine. Agonizing. World shattering. That even Harry, who saw so much, didn't understand or perhaps refused to understand.

Harry had somehow still assumed, despite his words, that Voldemort viewed him as a trophy to be collected. An obsession, for all of his pretty words. Tom felt devastated. Harry resisted the urge to shiver and the wound on his stomach gave a phantom stab. His hand twitched to cover the area before he could catch himself.

"It doesn't matter what I think you are," Harry's voice didn't shake. He was past playing the lamb now. "I'm not going to let you go, you knew that, you know that. Not with what you do with your freedom, with your *eternity.*" He aimed his wand. He had absolutely no doubt that Tom would keep killing if he was left alone, unhindered. As if the body count wasn't high enough already.

"You have spent your life endlessly sacrificing yourself for other people." Tom prowled closer still, like he couldn't possibly stay away even with the rage pouring off him, digging into Harry's skin. "Even now, you rushed headlong into danger – alone – because you feel hopelessly responsible for my crimes as if they were your own. I'm not the poison, Harry. Any venom you've choked on has always been your own."

"I'm your Horcrux!" It was the first time Harry had said it aloud to him, and the emotions flared again. Possessive, silken warmth that Harry could sink into so easily if he let it entice him properly, if he ignored the shards of glass buried ready to cut him among the welcoming folds of Tom's brain. "That's what you meant when you called me your soulmate!"

He'd spent so long feeling tainted, contagious, alienated from his own brain. All anyone saw when they looked at him was Tom's face, and maybe they were bloody right so why even bother?

Tom made no effort to hide, feeding Harry everything as the emotions nuzzled against his Occlumency barriers and slipped past as if there was nothing there at all. But then, Harry should have always known that he couldn't keep out something that was already inside him long before the fortress doors were shut.

Voldemort was immortal. Locking him up in a measly mortal's prison wasn't – couldn't be – enough. The bars would rot and the magic would fade to dust before the man ever did. Harry had never felt more terrified in his life. This wasn't an end, this wasn't closure or peace, it was eternity.

"Yes," Tom breathed. "You are." They stopped only a few feet away from each other, and for all of Tom's reverent tone his expression stayed serious now. Harry didn't flinch as his hand stretched out,

fingers just brushing Harry's cheek like he always did. "But that doesn't make you responsible, that just makes you my greatest creation. I am responsible for you, not the other way round." The words were almost even kind, and Tom spoke softly. "I haven't infected you, for all my efforts."

The kindness of it made Harry crack. He could have dealt with the rage and the violence, with the corpses and the crime scenes, but never that happiness or this *love.*

"I feel infected."

"Wounds do that when you don't give them the proper care." In a second he was properly close, not just brushing Harry's cheek but cradling it. "**You could come with me, Harry. If you wanted to.**"

Harry's breath rattled right out of his lungs, and the whole room felt airless. He couldn't take his eyes off Tom. "Come with you?" he repeated. "I'm not going on a murder road trip with you. I-I need to finish this. We need to finish this."

"You want to save the world, even though the world has done nothing but abuse your kindness," Tom said. "I want to save you. I certainly would prefer not to sacrifice you for the sake of my freedom and my life."

The butterflies had symbolized – offered – the world's most twisted form of salvation, hadn't they? Whether that salvation was wanted or not. Purification through fire and blood, death spilled to fashion rebirth whenever it came to him. He'd thought it before, but it still struck him every time. While all of Voldemort's murders had been artistic in their way, it was the butterflies which had always been for Harry. Love and hate and happiness and rage, all dizzyingly entwined.

"You'd stop killing if I came with you?" Harry felt abruptly lightheaded.

"I cannot promise it would never happen," Tom said. "Should I feel the need to defend myself. But … what use have I for pale substitutes when I could have you?"

Harry should curse, he should return the blade Voldemort had stuck in his insides, he should do anything but say yes. Then they would fight, and there were no Aurors knowing where to find him this time. He should make one last sacrifice, and keep going even if in his heart he knew there would always be other cases. There would be copycats, and Horcruxes to track down if he wanted to destroy Tom properly. There would be other killers who wanted to prove their dominance through butchering him without beauty or thought. There would be people wanting things, wanting answers, wanting him to save them. There would always, always be someone else to save until Harry wasn't even a few old scars and bandages and was just dust. Broken.

It was so nice not feeling like poison when he was with Voldemort. Tom thought he was beautiful, astonishing, so many things that Harry wished he was.

"And if I say no, you try to kidnap me instead?" Harry raised his brows and tried to remain casual. "For my own good or some shit?"

"I have considered it, for the imprisonment you would force on me," Tom replied evenly. "It would be fitting – but no. I, unlike you, prefer choices instead of ultimatums. You know that."

Harry nearly spluttered, eyes narrowing. "I believe in choices! Our choices define who we are. You choose to murder people and I choose to stop you. You can't twist that!"

"Stop killing, or I'll kill you. Stop killing, or I will take your freedom away from you. Do as I say, or I will force you to. You are not offering a choice, Harry." Tom's voice cracked whip sharp with frustration, irritation, that lingering distress that lurked real beneath all masks of professionalism. "A choice is: kill Barty Crouch and save your friend, or walk away and save yourself. A choice is: come with me, or do whatever else you please … but note that I will respond to that decision accordingly. I do not try and stop you from making your choices, I never have. I influence, I *persuade.* I would never imprison you and call it justice."

Tom let go and stepped away from him, jaw clenched before he sighed, rubbing his temples. "It's not your fault," he allowed, in a far too patient tone. The psychiatrist tone again. "You can't help what you are anymore than I can. I can offer you various tools to change and patchwork for the wounds you deal yourself in your guilt, as I always have and will for as long as I live, but healing is up to you. As is your forgiveness."

Harry's brow furrowed and he wrapped his arms tightly around himself. He couldn't actually think of a good response to that. A thick lump had wedged in his throat.

"Being locked in a prison cell with Smethwyck really did change you."

"The influence is not Smethwyck's," Tom said, shooting him a somewhat pointed look. "I told you, it's not about butterflies anymore."

Harry looked down. "You never answered what it was about instead."

"Life, death, beauty," Tom listed lightly, flashing him a strange smile. "A butterfly's heart perhaps?"

"Right, wouldn't want to actually kill a horcrux, however tempting that would be." Harry's voice had turned hoarse. A butterfly's heart. His ears rang.

"The world would be a far uglier place without you in it." The emotions tugged at Harry, lingered on him, hungry to have and to hold til death do them apart. "And you know you could be happy with me," Tom said. "If you let yourself." He turned away, scooping the locket up off the floor and tucking it into his pocket. "Look after yourself then, Harry Potter. I'll be around if you need me."

He was leaving.

He hadn't even anticipated the thought of Voldemort just leaving – leaving him, without death or any kind of fight at all. Voldemort had fought so hard to claim him that his leaving now seemed wrong.

"Happy?" It was like someone had struck a fire beneath his skin and in an instant Harry had crossed the room after Tom, shoving him hard. "*Happy?"* He shoved him again. "Fuck you. You thought I was *happy?* You tore me to a million pieces like it was a game to you, for your fucking art project. It wasn't happiness, it was relief because I assumed that for a second I'd found something good, something I could depend on."

"And you have become remarkably strong through surviving the ordeal. It's not quite going right down to the foundations and building up again, but I think I did a rather exquisite job on you." Tom caught hold of his wrists, nails digging into the skin. "You just told me no, even when it could save people to surrender yourself over to me, didn't you?"

Harry stopped, eyes wide. His head reeled.

"I believe that's quite a breakthrough in your therapy, Harry." Tom kissed him then – a devouring, firebrand of a kiss that sparked heat all the way down to Harry's toes. When they parted, he gasped for air like he was drowning, cheeks flushed. His fingers had white-knuckled from holding Tom's shirt so fast.

"No," Tom murmured, eyes bright. "I don't think you need me to rescue you anymore, my butterfly."

Harry touched a hand to his lip, feeling like his stomach had bottomed out."And that's it? Job done, he's capable of telling me to fuck off instead of putting his head on the chopping block. Let's just leave him to it. What the hell type of therapy is that?!"

"I thought you didn't particularly appreciate my interference and efforts in your life? I thought I was poison?"

Harry's jaw clenched at that question, and he stared at his hands still knotted in Tom's clothes to keep him in place. Of course he didn't want the murders, the torture, the shattering on someone's doorstep in the middle of the night. But how could Tom just take his brain and shake it around and then just *leave* like that was nothing? How could he practically confess love and walk away?

"I don't – but this isn't like you. This isn't your pattern of behaviour."

"Have you ever considered that I simply don't want to waste my considerable time and intellect rotting in Smethwyck's prison until he decides he'd rather fry my brain than let someone else have it? You are currently attempting to force me to either spend life in prison or kill you. Neither is something I am willing to commit to."

His grip on Tom tightened further, it had to be painful by now.

"So you're just leaving? No manipulation, no threats, no severed limbs mailed into my letterbox in two weeks time?" Harry could scarcely believe it. He didn't believe it. Voldemort had to be scheming something.

Tom's eyes narrowed. "I have no interest in enabling your heroic destructive streak by playing the villain for you. You either want to come with me or you don't, it's as simple as that. Any other course of action at this stage is both foolish and boring. You can continue to deny your own obsession if you would like, but I will not indulge you in it and let you act like my soul is *poison* to spit back in my face. I like myself too much to put up with that. The next move is yours. Let me know when you've decided what you want."

And then he was gone.

Happy Halloween! I just about made it. The end is in sight for this haunted, cursed fic and I have never been more relieved in my life.

Chapter 39

"What do you mean, he left?" Scrimgeour growled. "You let him go? How could you?"

Harry's eyes narrowed. "And where have you been these last two weeks?"

The silence rang damning, and Scrimgeour at least had the decency to look a little ashamed. Still, there was a steely set to his jaw. He dragged a hand over his grizzled face and released a breath, before deflating and dropping to sit in his chair. "Do you have any idea where he might have gone? We're barely containing mass panic at the escape."

Harry shook his head. He knew far more about Tom now than he had before, but he didn't think he'd ever find the man – whatever he was – predictable. The discussion of Horcruxes hovered in his mouth.

"We need to find him," Scrimgeour said.

"You need to find him." It took Harry everything he had to say it.

Scrimgeour froze and straightened abruptly. "Excuse me?"

"I'm retired, remember? I dealt with your copycat. I caught Voldemort for you once before."

"Well, unretire because we need you to catch him again. This is Voldemort. People are going to die!"

"That's not my fault." Funny, that he could almost believe that now. Feel Tom's hand cradling him, looking at him with such a myriad mix of emotions, as he murmured that Harry was his responsibility and that Harry was faultless. And maybe he finally understood, a little bit. "He makes his own choices on if he kills or not. I'm not the one killing people."

It had felt like he was, for the longest time. With the emotions at crime scenes, the sense of complicity. But to claim responsibility for Voldemort's kills was to suggest that the killer had no agency, no choice in what he did. And the one thing Tom had finally managed to make him see was that there was always a choice.

Even if he did catch Voldemort, for a second time, the first had near killed him. What would the third time do? Or the fourth? The only thing that would stop Voldemort for good was killing him or destroying him completely, and despite everything, Harry didn't want to do either.

He just didn't want to see more people hurt.

Scrimgeour stared at him as if he'd morphed into a minotaur in front of his eyes – horrified, disbelieving, a little repulsed.

Harry's insides squeezed and he forced himself to remain steady. If he could say no to Voldemort, he could say no to the Ministry.

"And are you really ready to let that monster walk away free?" Scrimgeour demanded, leaning in over the table. "No one else knows him like you do, can do what you do."

"I caught him for you once." Harry's voice began to rise. The rage began to boil, the infection of the last decade of his life, the seething guilt that had corroded his insides for so long beginning to spew.

"You couldn't even fucking keep him caught. How many times do I need to let him destroy me for it to be enough? For you to say that I've done my duty?" Harry surged to his feet, yanking up his shirt to reveal the knotted scar along his belly as Scrimgeour looked aghast. "Maybe I need to actually let him kill me this time?"

"Nobody's saying that," Scrimgeour began.

"And yet you keep dragging me back to this case even when it's quite obviously doing me no good. For Merlin's sake, you had to force me to get a psychiatrist once already because of how bad this case was for me, and look how that turned out."

"Exactly how far have you gone into his head this time?" The question was quiet and Harry hated it. Hated the assumption behind it. So the second he wasn't a complete pushover he was a serial killer, was that it?

Harry had to laugh, and shook his head. If Scrimgeour knew the truth about the connection, what would he do then? Throw Harry into Azkaban immediately, seeing as he wasn't co-operating?

"I understand the last two weeks have been trying," Scrimgeour said. "Perhaps if you get some rest, we can return to this discussion tomorrow."

"No." Harry walked out.

He'd never felt so high on relief in his life.

Funny. All that time spent wracking his brain over the symbolism of Voldemort's crimes, and he'd never once equated butterfly wings with the ability to fly away and escape.

True to his word, Voldemort didn't send him any severed limbs or challenges. There were still murders – but they weren't butterflies this time.

The bodies of Bellatrix, Rodolphus, and Rabastan Lestrange were found suspended in the atrium of the Ministry with Voldemort's distinctive artistry and emotion. Love, possessiveness, protectiveness.

Merlin, why wouldn't Tom just run? Leave England while he had the chance and live his eternity out quietly until people gave up hunting him?

The months slipped by. Any copycat killer, or killer who attempted to come after Harry or even bait him, were found gruesomely murdered. They were always missing one hand – the warning punishment for thieves who tried to touch and take what wasn't theirs.

Harry knew why Tom hadn't left and it sunk into his skin more than anything Scrimgeour could say to him. And Scrimgeour had a lot to say on the matter – about obsession, and how if he wasn't willing to hunt Voldemort would he be willing to be bait at least?

Three months in, Rita Skeeter was found skinned in a garbage can outside of the Ministry. Her body crawled with beetles like maggots, and the scraps of her flesh had been pinned into the wall and painted with letters like a collage of notes.

LEAVE HIM ALONE

The reporters stopped hounding Harry after that, they didn't dare, and finally there was something like the space he'd desperately wanted. People still stared of course, when Harry came to the Wizarding

World, but much like before he tried to avoid that.

He couldn't help but notice that Tom hadn't just left him to say 'no' on his own no matter what he said about Harry no longer needing rescuing. He sort of wished he hadn't noticed, but he did.

If you need me, I'll be around.

Maybe it was Voldemort trying to show him exactly the peace and happiness he could offer Harry if he surrendered. Maybe it was another manipulation designed to have him begging to come with Tom, maybe it wasn't.

Harry tried not to think about it. He thought about Tom Riddle and Lord Voldemort more often than not. He thought about the Horcruxes still out there, and the fact that Voldemort's current generosity towards him probably wouldn't last. Voldemort was a killer and although he was not compelled to behave as he did, he would keep doing it until he was stopped.

This was a whim in some disturbed grand master-plan, it had to be.

Lord Voldemort was not a creature prone to mercy.

Harry wondered if peace was his reward for not chasing and trying to catch Tom again. He wondered if he could have had it all along, if he simply told the Ministry no and refused to look at the butterflies, but he didn't think so.

Voldemort had genuinely changed.

Or was Voldemort simply trying to manipulate him into thinking he'd changed so he could claim his trophy still?

No, Harry had changed him. Somewhere along the way of walking around each other's brains playing cat and mouse something had shifted until it didn't feel quite so much like the world's most twisted game anymore.

It took Harry six months to realize that maybe Voldemort really wasn't playing with him this time. The choice was his. Voldemort would protect him at a distance, because he was a Horcrux, and not screw with him because … because…

Harry touched a hand to his lips and imagined Tom's mouth pressed against his own. The one thing Tom had once shown him when Harry demanded something real.

A butterfly's heart.

After a year, he sent Tom an owl.

"You actually came," Harry said. Perhaps, considering revelations of the past year, that shouldn't have been surprising.

"I told you I'd always come for you, if you needed me." Still, Tom's eyes tracked warily around Harry's home for the possibility of a trap.

"I haven't planned anything with the Ministry."

Tom stared at him, hard, as if trying to parse the truth of that statement right out of Harry's eyes. Harry half-expected actual legilimency, but he let his emotions flicker out into the air between them instead.

He hadn't invited Tom to capture him. Maybe that surprised him even more than Tom actually turning up when Harry asked him to.

"Why am I here, Harry?"

Tom's expression remained carefully guarded and Harry found he hated it. He swallowed.

"You told me the next move was mine, I'm making a move."

"You already made your move when you chose to let me go instead of joining the Ministry in their manhunt," Tom said. "And I made mine in turn. Unlike you, I'm afraid, I am not in a position to completely let you go –"

Harry shoved him up against the closed door and kissed him. It was the first time he'd ever initiated one of the few kisses they'd ever shared, and he relished Tom's shock. His sharp inhalation of breath, the way he melted a little bit before his fingers wound tight into Harry's hair to keep him close.

It wasn't simple. He hadn't forgiven Tom and as he kissed he bit and raked his nails into the back of Tom's neck. But it was foolish and boring to pretend that whatever was between them was merely blood and violence.

He hated the bastard for what he'd done – he'd killed his parents, he'd killed Ron and so many others without even a trace of regret. But oh Harry would have done anything to be without regret and even now the only true peace he seemed to find was in Voldemort's brain.

Tom pulled back a little to study him, lips parted and pupils blown. His gaze lingered on Harry's lips before darting up to his eyes. "If you need something, you can ask," he murmured.

"You think I'm trying to manipulate you?"

"I find we are always trying to manipulate each other, even in our sincerity. Especially in our truth. We all want things, we all need things, and we all aim to have those wants and needs met. I am not trying to insult you, Harry."

Harry swallowed, and wished he could have stuck to kissing. That, at least, didn't require thought. "Are you going to start a psychological discussion every time we kiss?"

"You say that like you plan to kiss me more often." Tom continued to study him with what could almost be called wariness still, and that was probably fair enough. They made a mess of each other more often than not. This whole thing was probably a terrible idea, doomed to failure and ruin. Certainly, it was never going to work when Tom repulsed him as much as he drew him in.

But.

His fingers tightened again on Tom's shirt and he was reminded of the last time they met.

"I …" Harry considered his words. "I don't hate the person I've become with you." He enjoyed being able to say no, in having a choice. "And I don't hate you for getting the reporters to back off either, though I still think your methodology leaves much to be desired. We seriously need to work on your methodology."

Tom's head tilted, his expression frozen.

"You said … you said you'd stop killing if I came with you willingly. Does that offer still stand?"

"I am not expecting you to come with me on a murder road trip, so yes. Though I am admittedly curious what changed your mind, seeing as I have not done anything to persuade you either way."

"The fact you haven't done anything," Harry said honestly. "I'm not going to come with you just so you can finish picking my mind to pieces. I don't like people messing with my head. You meant it, didn't you, that it was my choice this time?"

"Yes."

"Then that's why. And the fact you're being less of a prick then when you were trying to shatter me into a million pieces and build me up again."

Tom looked mildly uncomfortable and it gave Harry some vindictive satisfaction. Still.

"I'm not saying this is happily ever after," Harry said, letting go of Tom's shirt. "But I still have questions. And you need to stop taunting the Ministry, because whenever you do they whine to me about it and it's kind of screwing with my retirement."

Tom snorted. "I'm wondering if I created a monster with this new brand of selfishness." His eyes gleamed though, and he looked at Harry with a breathtakingly tentative appreciation, as if he could barely believe this was happening.

Harry adored it. But he'd always liked the way Tom looked at him like he was something exquisite, strong, rather than the victim that even Hermione viewed him as. She was oh so worried that he'd finally been broken by the world and given up, rather than believing that maybe giving up was the hardest and best thing he'd ever done.

"So have I passed your professional test on being of sound mind and body?"

"Not in the slightest." Maybe that wasn't surprising, considering Tom's last bill of health ended with being stabbed through the gut.

But Tom kissed him again all the same.

Harry closed his eyes and allowed himself to breathe, allowed Tom's emotions to wash over him like a soothing balm or a buffer. Tom's arm wrapped around his back, drawing him closer against him, up onto his toes to deepen the kiss.

A shiver ran down Harry's spine. In an instant he was tugging at Tom's shirt, undoing the buttons as Tom made another startled sound.

It wasn't that he no longer thought that Tom needed to be stopped. Of course he did. And it wasn't that Harry was suddenly okay with murders and everything that had happened - but Tom made him feel steady. Safe, even when Tom was the last person who should ever make him feel safe and it was all utterly fucked up and the hair on the back of his skin was standing on end and the lips against his were hot and demanding.

Maybe everyone had the choice between what was right and what was easy, but Harry was so tired of what doing what was right when it didn't seem to make any difference. Either way, he would never find the Horcruxes when Voldemort knew he knew about them.

So what was the harm in making sure no one else was hurt? And if that wasn't the whole story...well, hadn't Harry earned a selfish bit of peace? Maybe that was what made Tom dangerous. He made Harry want to be selfish more than anything. To stop having to worry about it for bloody once, because with Tom it wasn't his fault.

Tom's fingers carded through his hair, tugging at his scalp and he nipped at his lips. Not quite love without violence either. In a heartbeat he'd spun them so Harry was the one pressed against the door, arching up into the touch with his trousers more tight than he should probably admit to.

"You've changed," Tom murmured, in a stolen breath. "You're…"

"Not broken and devastated on your doorstep at three in the morning?" Harry bit hard. "Funny, that happens when you're not trying to crush someone into a million pieces."

"I still think you were beautiful broken."

Harry nearly kneed him in the crotch at that point, however much he wanted the peace Tom could offer - but the comment wasn't really a surprising one. However much Tom prioritized strength and healing over hurt, the urge to kill and tear Harry apart would always still be there.

"But," Tom said, lips dipping to his throat. "I suppose butterflies aren't too bad either."

"Fuck you." Harry almost laughed. He felt dizzy on how stupid this all was, on his own recklessness. It wasn't love. Or maybe it was, but what did that even matter? The point was that they'd made homes in each other's head and Harry no longer knew how to unblur the lines. He didn't know what his life was without Tom in it.

And Tom had left him. He couldn't bloody stand by that.

Lord Voldemort was immortal - the choices were meticulously hunt down each and every horcrux and kill himself in the process, or live a little and see if they could change each other some more and work out some middle ground that wasn't completely and utterly screwed.

He definitely wasn't of sound mind and body. But he had butterfly wings now, and after all the shit he'd gone through to get them, he wasn't quite so eager to get rid of them. And maybe comparing mass murdering Dark Lords versus serial killers who made death into art, his one wasn't so bad compared to the possibilities. Tom definitely wasn't of sound mind and body either, but it could be worse.

Tom's lips were warm against his throat, especially compared to the chill of the room as their shirts vanished.

How long had Tom been waiting for this? The fear that he was being manipulated prickled in the back of Harry's head again, and maybe it always would.

"Does that mean you'll come with me?" Tom murmured against his ear.

Harry didn't quite know what it meant yet, he hadn't got that far. But he knew he wanted more. He knew that whatever they were, whatever they would become, they weren't done with each other. He'd spent too long chasing after Tom to suddenly stop now, whatever he told the Auror department and whatever they thought about his morals now.

"It means stop talking and bloody well kiss me."

Tom obliged.

They ended up at the bed. Pleasure sparking. Breaths gasping.

It was about that point that the Aurors burst in.

Part Two: 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry had his wand in his hand in an instant, and Tom had an arm pinned around Harry's throat to hold him as body armor the second after.

The grip squeezed a little too tight so he assumed Tom thought he had something to bloody well do with this. As if he wouldn't have picked a less awkward time if he had something to do with it!

The bedsheets were still rumpled and twisted beneath them. He could feel Tom's chest rising and falling quickly, warm against Harry's bare back. His cheeks burned.

"We both know you're not going to kill him, Mr Riddle," Scrimgeour said. "So you may as well release Potter." He stood with his wand pointed right at them, with Dawlish and several other of Harry's former colleagues behind him. Shacklebolt towered steady as ever in the corner, expression implacable in comparison to the varying expressions of dubious shock on the rest of the Aurors had faced with the rather compromising scene they'd walked in on.

"You knew I would come the second he called," Tom theorized, after a moment.

Scrimgeour tipped his head in agreement with an awful air of triumph.
"I knew you would come for him at some point - however long it took - whether he called you or not."

So they had put a watch on the house. Harry felt he probably should have noticed, but honestly he'd finally let himself relax. To believe he had his privacy, his space. To believe that his colleagues wouldn't do this, even if he could understand the compulsion and obsession to catch Voldemort more than anyone.

And there was no way Tom was getting out of it this time. He was outnumbered once more, and the flashbacks to the Riddle House must have been visceral. Another bed, another unfurling of themselves to reveal the truth anew.

"You seem oddly convinced he won't hurt me," Harry spoke up. "Considering last time he gutted me and left me in physical therapy for over a year." The scar gave a phantom twinge and Harry considered his options.

Dawlish's eyes flicked down to the exposed and puckered scar on Harry's stomach. What felt only a few minutes ago, Tom had been on his knees before Harry as he sat on the bed, leaning in to press the softest of kisses against the white line of ruined flesh.

"You seem to be in fucking bed with him," Scrimgeour snapped back in response. There it was, that look on his face, a seedling at first when Harry had glanced it in the man's office a year ago and now the expression was in full bloom. Disgusted pity. It was the same look he'd sometimes seen new Aurors give Voldemort's crime scenes - blind and presumptive and like 'dead' was the only thing worth noting.

His fingers curled a little tighter around his wand and the Auror's gazes all flicked to it. He realized, then, that they thought he might attack them. That he'd been - he didn't know what they thought had

happened. That he had gone so far into Voldemort's head that any distinction between Lord Voldemort and Harry Potter could no longer be made? As if it had ever been that clean cut.

The fury came suddenly, sharply. Acrid beneath his tongue. Because oh they were so eager to turn on him the second that he wasn't what they wanted, weren't they? As if that was any better than the twisted fantasy Voldemort had once tried to enforce with his butterflies.

The stalemate stretched on the brink of violence for a moment, two.
Tom's chest settled against his back, reaching a steadiness, an eerie calm radiating in the corners of his brain.

Harry tilted his head, just slightly, to brush his lips along the line of Tom's jaw.

No more killing, if I come with you. You promised.

No more killing, for me.

Tom exhaled a shaky breath and his arm, still hooked around Harry's throat, loosened before snaking away. Releasing him completely. His hands rose into the air and he let his wand drop to lie harmless among the crisp Gryffindor red sheets. His jaw clenched, expression otherwise carefully closed off.

"Potter, away from him. You against that that wall and Riddle against the opposite one," Scrimgeour ordered. "Best you drop your wand too."

Harry really wished he hadn't done that - that he would at least have done the public courtesy of pretending he didn't think Harry was on Voldemort's side. After everything it seemed a slap in the face.

Moreover, he could practically see Smethwyck's grubby fingers looming in the corner of his vision to stab and scrabble at the small fractions of peace that Harry had managed to collect over his life. Poring over them and rearranging Harry's memories and emotions like they were his own personal collection of jewels on a shelf to flash to visitors like the certificates in his office.

In a split second Harry had cursed. Launching into action as the room exploded in a volley and crash of spells arcing dazzling and dizzying. Tom was at his sides in an instant and between the two of them the Aurors stood no chance.

Harry dropped to his knees next to Scrimgeour, pressing his fingers to the man's neck to find a pulse.

"No more killing," Tom said, softly. "That's what you asked me for, is it not?"

The pulse was a little sluggish beneath Harry's touch but it was unmistakably there.

He looked up as Tom's bare feet padded into view. He almost wanted to laugh at the bare feet, the pink toes so exposed and harmless looking considering what exactly the Dark Wizard was capable of. Harry remembered Tom's shoes being tossed aside in a careless heap somewhere on the way to the bedroom, even if the fact that Tom bothered to take his shoes off at all before clambering onto Harry's bed was anything but careless.

Tom's fingers slipped to cup his jaw, the pad of his thumb caressed Harry's lower lip before he nudged his head up so that they were looking at each other. Harry swallowed and Tom's gaze dipped, just as hungry - if not more so - than they had been before the interruption.

"You protected me against your Aurors," he murmured.

"You didn't kill them."

He let Tom tug him up to his feet and reel him into a kiss, breathless and aching and almost even sweet except for the edge of possessiveness. Harry felt dizzy with the force of his want.

"You should go," Harry said, hoarse. "Before they wake up. Leave England."

"You could come with me." Tom's hand moved to cradle the back of his head again, stroking through his hair. "What is there for you here? Them?" He waved a contemptuous hand at the Aurors.

It was a step, something he couldn't take out. But then so was knocking out a room of England's best Aurors alongside a murderous serial killer. He'd miss Hermione though. It hadn't been the same since Ron died. Tom had done terrible things.

"Why did you save me?" Tom asked next, gaze intent.

"Because sending you back to prison would do nothing. Except as a form of torture, perhaps. Prison is for rehabilitation, detainment in dangerous cases, it's supposed to do something to help not just be a place where we send people because we don't know what else to do with them. Either way, it does nothing in your case. You've escaped before. They'd probably try and execute you - send you over to the US on the quiet or something"

"It wouldn't kill me."

"No, but other people would get hurt."

"Yourself included, considering the way they were looking at you."

"I'm tired," Harry confessed.

Tom smiled, then, and leaned into kiss him again.
"Come with me, Harry."

That time, he said yes.

The Ministry tried to find them.

The papers splashed the story lurid across the wizarding communities of Europe and America - have you seen these wizards?

No one had.

Tom took great joy in showing Harry the world, remembering the man's initial desires in their very first sessions to see the world.

Paris, Rome, Venice - he even managed to get Harry to a nice beach hut to splay out in the sun as his tanned skin turned golden and Tom watched the stress lines melt away from his face. It wasn't sustainable. He'd run out of money and they'd need to settle somewhere for that, but for now as they got to know each other in new ways it was good.

A new game. Oh, of course it was still a game. Maybe not breaking his boy down, but he saw Harry flourish under his subtle guidance more and more every day.

He made a game of Harry Potter's happiness.

It wasn't entirely dissimilar to the games they had always played before, to his mind. Harry seemed to like this one more. He never would have, once, before Tom took a chisel to sculpt him with.

He didn't every night in their rooms, when glamours and disguises were no longer necessary, he memorised, he adored, and Harry stole himself snatches of peace because a complete lack of remorse left little room for fretting about the past.

It wouldn't last forever, he thought. He dipped down to kiss Harry's mouth, to catch the desperate pleas and moans he'd once imagined spread out in blood and violence. He trailed his hands along slim hips and scars and rocked Harry against his body until it felt that two separate bodies seemed a technicality only.

Harry's head tilted - studying him, seeing everything, sharp as cut class in the Cuban sunlight. He reached out a hand, tracing the hard edges of Tom's cheeks and the softness of his lips. He consumed and clouded Tom's mind at every waking moment.

But all games ended. Humans died, people got hurt, everyone got a little bored and neither of them were made for peace.

Harry rolled them over to take control of the kiss - to finish what they started.

It wouldn't last forever, but maybe for now it was enough.

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Year! Out with the old, in with the new. It's nice to see this story finished, it's been one heck of a ride and I hope you guys have enjoyed it too :) I'm glad I grew to like this story again before the end. If you liked the story, obviously I'd love to hear your comments no matter how small or whatever. Also, if you have somehow made it this far without watching NBC'S Hannibal, you should go and do that now.

Works inspired by this one

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